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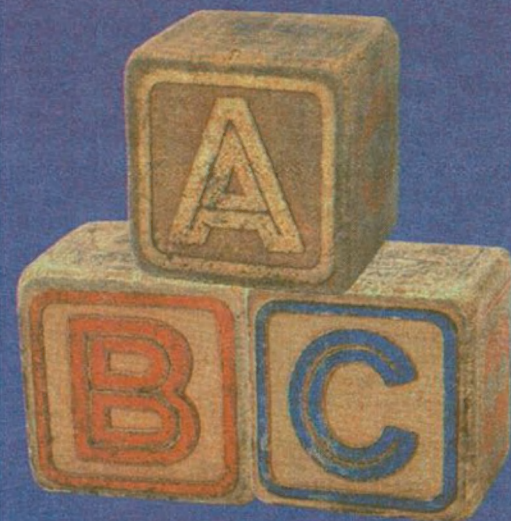
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Toronto Computes!

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There's a big difference between want and need. The two words often get confused — especially now, around Christmas. I could make a long list of things that I want and then justify each of these things turning it into a need. I'm sure most people can also make a similar list. While putting this issue together we came across many great pieces of technology — be it hardware or software. You can be sure that staff at *Toronto Computes!* and I could justify our need for every piece that came through our office. However, it is also true that most of us here did not need the bulk of the stuff that we saw. After an evening or two of deciding what my technological needs are, also procrastinating from pressing duties, I managed to compile a short and relatively modest list — with ample justification for each item.

On top of this list is a speech recognition software package. I have tested them previously and found them to be OK but not brilliant. When all is said and done, I will invest some more time and try to make a go with a speech recognition package. It will reduce repetitive strain on my fingers.

Next on my list is a very rudimentary and common removable hard drive system. A friend of mine has one and it seems like an ideal way to have one computer do many things. My main PC is set up to record music. I don't play games on it because settings tend to change when new programs get installed. If I could just swap the main bootable hard disk I could use the one computer for music, video, games and whatever else. A removable hard disk system would also protect the computer from probing little fingers of children.



Of all the cool things I have seen lately, the Silent Violin from Yamaha has really touched my soul. I questioned whether I should put it on this list — it is more of a want than a need. I have a very nice violin. I don't play it much because I am woefully out of practice. When I got the Silent Violin to test I played on it nearly every day. Somehow knowing that my inadequate technique was only irritating me and not the rest of my family made me feel good. Is it a need — I'm not sure, but I know that my playing will improve with the Silent Violin.

Although not having anything to do with technology the last item on my list is time. Time to correctly configure a speech recognition package. Time to rebuild my PC, again, with a removable hard drive system. Time to practice on the violin. Time to enjoy all the technology I have.

Have a wonderful and safe Christmas.

On a separate note we decided to change the name of our bi-monthly digital photography contest. We deemed that the name Shooting Spree was not appropriate given the amount of random shootings that have been taking place around the world. The contest remains identical except for the new name Photo Spree. Check out the contest on page 66. ♦

Nestor Gula can be reached by e-mailing nestor@tcp.ca

Reader Feedback

Tell the bad as well as the good

I have just read Andrew Moore-Crispin's article: "Digital Shots: Setting up a Digital Darkroom." *TC* / Nov.

He covers the topic adequately but like most people who write articles about digital photography and reproduction he has not covered the single most important issue. Having taken a colour digital photograph, or any photograph for that matter, one expects that the reproduction will appear at least somewhat the same as the original article. No blue or green casts, no surprises. While applications like *Adobe Elements* and *Photoshop* will help in removing these offending components, there's no guarantee that what will be printed will be what we see on the screen. Similarly, when scanning prints something gets lost in the translation from scanner to screen to printer. The novice should be forewarned that the monitor must be balanced to their printer. In Adobe there is an

aid to this process but in other applications this facility is sometimes lacking. I have been a digital photographer for as long as digital cameras have been around and I have spent many hours tuning and adjusting in order to get the final prints just right. I invested in software from Monaco that makes the task a simple 20 minute process and now the images that are printed are very close to what's on the screen. It wasn't inexpensive, in fact the cost with all taxes was about \$1,000. But now I can readjust my monitor bi-weekly and produce prints that I am proud of.

It might sound like over kill but there is nothing more disheartening than to have taken that "keeper" only to find that when printed it isn't even close. I think that if you plan to run further articles similar to Mr. Moore-Crispin's you should describe the pitfalls that one can expect.

Serge Holoduke

Zone Alarm still my firewall of choice

After reading a letter from Hal Koch regarding *Zone Alarm* "Dangerous Firewall" I had to respond. Both *Zone Alarm* freeware & *Zone Alarm Pro* are fine Firewalls contrary to the writer's experience. It does not rewrite "other files," it does not sabotage your *IE*, e-mail or other programs. It removes some of its registry entries, but it does not contain any "nasty features." This can be confirmed simply by using a tracking program that tells you changes made. I have used *ZA* both on home units and on a network with no issues. We all know Windows 9x is prone to failure when you are installing and uninstalling many programs, as it seems this reader does. Blame the operating system or user, but don't condemn *ZA* without proving first exactly which files it removed from your unit and that it was *ZA* that did it.

Jim Smith

Letter of the Month

For his letter this month, Serge Holoduke wins a copy of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* from Infogrames. *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* improves on the original game and adds the ability to play in five Six Flags theme parks (including Magic Mountain and Great Adventure) and add 25 official Six Flags coasters to your own parks. See review on pg 64.



Letters on issues raised in the paper or general computer topics are welcome. Please be brief. We regret that we are unable to look up stories from past issues, suggest products, or solve all your computer problems. All correspondence must include your full name in addition to your e-mail or snail-mail address. Letters may be edited for space or content.

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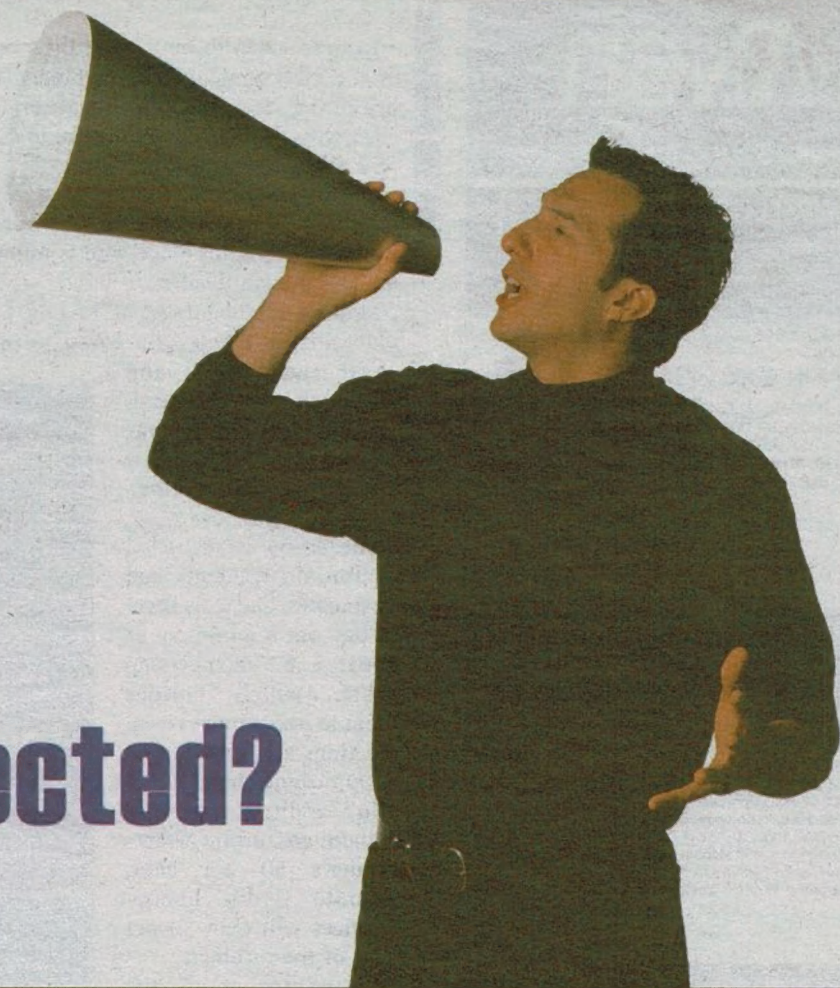
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By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Toronto looks to be joining the ranks of the environmentally enlightened by beginning to accept wind-generated electricity as a viable alternative to current power generating methods.

The latest electricity generating wind turbine is being erected on the waterfront at Exhibition Place, and is following the Danish (leaders in wind turbine adoption) methodology of having private citizens invest in a co-op to purchase the turbine and keep it operational. Construction will be complete in December, WindShare (www.windshare.ca) says.

The co-op is restricted to Toronto residents and businesses, and asks them to pay out a minimum of \$501; a \$1 membership share, which entitles them to one vote at co-op meetings and at least five \$100 turbine shares.

In addition to the WindShare turbine shareholder's 50 per cent, Toronto Hydro Energy Services will own 50 per cent of the turbines.

WindShare says the revenue generated from the Exhibition Place wind turbines will be sold to Toronto Hydro under the terms of a three-year contract. Once this contract has expired, the organization wants to pursue its original goal of net billing, where the revenue of the turbine will be applied to co-op members' electricity bills according to how many shares they have purchased. WindShare is estimating a \$5 return on investment per \$100 share for the first year and \$8 in the second and third years. Revenue will vary according to electricity prices.

WindShare goes on to say that by tapping wind power, each turbine can offset the production of greenhouse gasses in the order of up to 1,800,000 Kg of carbon dioxide and up to 8,000 Kg of nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide.

Computers play a key role in determining where power-generating windmills should be situated. Computers check every metre of surveyed ground against weather patterns, elevation and ground pitch to get the highest blade

rotation and hence the most energy possible.

Recording industry's latest anti-piracy push

We've all heard about the Recording Industry Association of America's (RIAA) latest campaign against piracy that has recording artists telling fans that downloading music from peer-to-peer networks amounts to stealing from them.

Now, the latest RIAA anti-piracy cam-

problem with illegal MP3s and movie files on their networks, and has sent a letter out to Fortune 1000 companies that amounts to a cease and desist order.

"The use of your digital network to pirate music, movies and other copyrighted works both interferes with the business purposes your network was built to serve," the letter reads, "and subjects your employees and your company to significant legal liability."

One Arizona company has already settled out of court with the RIAA in the order of \$1 million for copyright material on its corporate network.

Guerilla marketing gets Microsoft in a (little) bit of trouble

Following the launch of MSN 8, and perhaps proving that no publicity is bad publicity, Microsoft's heavy marketing push on MSN 8 landed them in a bit of hot water in New York City. Actually, tepid water might be a more accurate analogy.

It seems that part of the MSN 8 marketing campaign was to plaster the New York streets with the stylized butterfly MSN logo. However, the software giant apparently neglected to get the necessary permission, though a Microsoft spokesperson told MSNBC the company did in fact receive a permit to stick the decals around the city, focusing on Central Park, where Bill Gates and Disney chairman Michael Eisner were announcing a deal that will see Disney content in MSN 8.

The Department of Transportation fined Microsoft a whopping \$50, which is sure to take a bite out of the \$300 million Gates is boasting to spend on publicity for the MSN 8

launch.

Included with the fine was a cease and desist order, threatening much larger fines if guerrilla ad campaigns like this one continue.

The largest such fine was handed out to IBM over painting and chalking its logo and 'Peace, Love and Linux' slogan in major US cities. The company was ordered to pay over \$120,000 in fines and removal fees. Microsoft also took a similar approach in Australia, painting its Xbox logo on sidewalks for the launch of the console. ♦



campaign is focusing again on big corporations and their networks, and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) is getting in on the action too.

The last push on big business to stop piracy was a stern reminder that file swapping is a potentially illegal practice; this campaign makes veiled threats of legal action and tells businesses in terms they can understand (read: Money) the possible implications of piracy.

The RIAA and MPAA say that a surprising number of corporations have a

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For all photographers *Gift Guide*

By CHRIS TALBOT

The holiday season is traditionally a time of picture-taking. It's conceivable that everyone reading this column has pictures left over from their childhood that were taken during holiday festivities.

It's also possible that most readers at some point in their young lives received a camera as a gift. Maybe it was a 35mm or maybe it was a goof-proof 110 camera. One of my first cameras was one of those long, rectangular 110 cameras with the blinding flashes that caused so much red-eye in my pictures. I remember shooting off a roll of film on Christmas day while we were unwrapping presents and cleaning up around the tree.

Even though I don't remember for sure, it's safe to say it was a couple of weeks before I saw any of those photos I had taken. These days, there's no need to wait — if

doing. Unfortunately, sales clerks at camera stores (unless you go to someplace like a Henry's or a Vistek) still don't know much about digital cameras. While you might get lucky and find someone who's really into shooting digitally, it is likely the person behind the counter is more familiar with film.

So the first step to buying a digital camera as a gift is to go into the store with some knowledge. As with any other gift, you'll need to figure out how much money you want to spend. Digital cameras start at \$50 to \$100 and go as high as tens of thousands. Cheap digital cameras, like those found in toy departments (believe it or not, they're there) or those not under glass in the electronics or camera section of a store, are about what you'd expect for such a good price.

The quality of the pictures is fairly low, and the budding photographer you give one of these cameras to will be unable to make prints because of the low resolution of the images.

However, if the recipient of your gift is a child who likes to take snapshots and see immediate results, or someone who only wants to take pictures that will be shown on a monitor (say, on a Web site or in an e-mail message), then one of these cheapo models might make an ideal gift.

If you want to lay down some more cash and get that special someone a camera that will be of high enough quality to make prints, you're probably looking at shelling out at least \$200. A 1 megapixel (MP) camera, which means you can make decent prints measuring 3.2x4.2 inches (a fairly small print), is at the bottom of the quality spectrum for printing digital pictures. You can stretch your prints to 4x6 inches, but it's pushing the quality boundaries of the images. You can buy a 1 MP digital camera for about \$200.

To easily make 4x6-inch prints, a photographer will need at least a 2 MP camera, which can be had for around \$300. A 3 MP camera will let the shooter easily make quality prints at 6x8.5 inches, but for a camera like this, the price is getting up there. Three megapixel cameras tend to go for about \$500 and up. Anything above a 3 MP camera will be more than enough for the casual photographer.

Aside from the camera's megapixel count, gift-givers can also take features into account. Unlike film cameras, digital cameras are capable of more than just taking still photographs. Some cameras allow you to choose colour modes (i.e. black-and-



FinePix 30i

Fujifilm

\$599

This 2 megapixel compact camera is great for the casual picture taker and ideal for those on the go because of the ability to play MP3 music files on it. The camera's lens is a little small, but the 30i still takes acceptable pictures. The selling feature of this camera is its ability to double as an MP3 player.

white, sepia, vibrant, etc.); some have a video mode built in (keep in mind most cameras don't offer TV-quality video, so it can't double as a full-featured digital video camera); others offer multiple shooting modes (automatic, manual, remote timer, etc.). Check out the www.canadacomputes.com archives for specific camera reviews.

If the photographer on your list already has a digital camera, or if you have some more gifts to buy the recipient of a digital camera, then here are some other options that would make great gifts.

continued on page 22



Camedia C-720 Ultra Zoom
Olympus
\$799

The C-720 is a great 3 megapixel camera. Armed with a good-sized, clear lens, the camera is smaller than a typical 35mm film camera. However, it has a very nice feel to it and is easy to use. Any hobbyist photographer would love to get this as a gift.

you own a digital camera, that is. As a child of the '80s, I received film cameras as gifts, whereas nowadays there will be kids (both young and old) who will unwrap a digital camera this holiday season. If you're on the receiving end of such a gift, good for you; but if you're the gift-giver and you're a little confused about how to shop for your favourite shutterbug this year, we have a few tips for you.

How to choose the perfect camera

When buying a digital camera, especially when it's meant to be a gift, you need to know what you're



PowerShot S30

Canon

\$799.99

As a 3.2 megapixel camera, the S30 is a pretty good unit for someone interested in doing more than just vacation snapshots. Using the S30 will give photographers full control over f-stops and shutter speeds. Best of all, they won't have to drill down through sub-menu after sub-menu to figure out how to change the settings. The biggest downside to this camera is that it uses a battery pack rather than AA batteries that you can pick up at any corner store, so if the pack dies when a photographer is out shooting, too bad.

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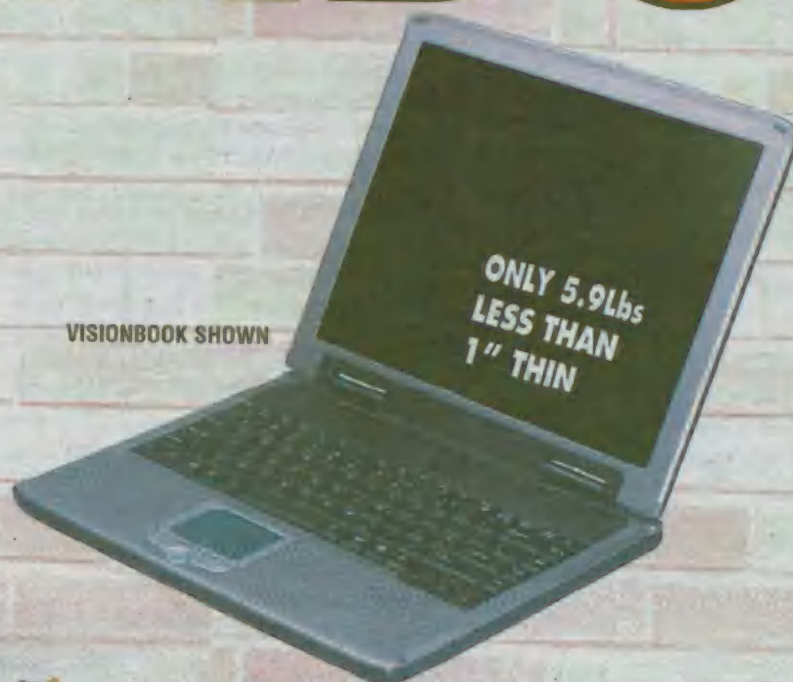
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For the video enthusiast

Gift Guide

By LEE RICKWOOD

If using cool new video tools isn't an adventure, shopping for them certainly is.

You can visit professional video dealers, consumer electronic stores, online shopping centres and mail order warehouses just to get a sense of all that's out there — or, use this handy *Toronto Computes!* video gift guide.

Whether shopping for yourself or your favourite shooter this holiday season, there are some great gifts out there for the adventurous videographer. Some are stocking stuffers for less than \$20; others are gifts for those who have everything, including friends who'll spend more than \$100,000 (all prices are Canadian unless noted).

Digital video cameras

First, the numbers game.

There are more than 150 camcorders on the market — and eight video formats. Consumer camcorder prices range from under \$300 to over \$6,000. So choosing one is a complex and crucial decision. Who will use it and why is as important as how much it costs and what it does.

The manufacturers mentioned here (and many, many others) offer several fine digital camcorders; here are a few of the more unique or outstanding products.

First off, for the truly discriminating digital video enthusiast, the Sony HDWF900 HDCAM is the ultimate. It records digital video at incredible resolution, has a whack of amazing features and functions and leaves most other cameras in the dust.

It should — list price is \$160,000! How nice have you been this year?

But in the more price-friendly DV family and format, one of the least expensive points of entry is the Sharp VL-NZ100U Digital Viewcam. It's a



nice "starter" camcorder, priced at less than \$1,000, with a basic range of features and functions for home use.

Canon's cool new Elura 200MC, on the other hand, is very much a video studio in your hand.

It records digital video and high quality still images to either MiniDV tape or memory card; it also records media clips in half-screen sizes for Internet streaming and video mail uses. Video editing software is included, along with a number of special effects and graphic backgrounds.

As are many conveniently designed, palm-sized digital camcorders, this one is loaded with features such as colour viewfinder, pop-up flash, optical and digital zoom, and a high quality 1.33-megapixel CCD.

Canon's image stabilization system is one of the best on the market; it makes using this lightweight camcorder a really enjoyable experience. The camcorder is priced around \$2,200.

Along with its many digital video offerings, Sony has recently introduced its own new format, called MicroMV, and tiny camcorders to go with it.

The MicroMV cassette is roughly half the size of MiniDV, but it still holds up to 60 minutes of video. If camcorder size is really an issue, these cameras are for you.

The DCR-IP220 model packs a 2.1-megapixel imager for high quality video and still images. It



also has Bluetooth wireless technology on board. Another new model, the DCR-IP55, features an innovative fold-down handgrip. Both use high-quality Carl Zeiss optics, 10X optical

and 120X digital zoom, SteadyShot picture stabilization and NightShot infrared system. The DCR-IP55 and the DCR-IP220 are priced at \$2,199 and \$3,299 respectively.

Panasonic, meanwhile, is turning heads with the cinema-like features of its new AG-DVX100.

It's called the world's first 24p DV camera recorder; it not only records regular digital video, it can record DV at 24 frames per second, the rate feature filmmakers use to shoot 35mm film.

At \$6,000, this camcorder may not be for everyone. But for demanding applications, such as broadcast TV, independent filmmaking and documentary production, this new camcorder truly is revolutionary.

The AG-DVX100 uses three CCDs for exceptional imagery and comes with a wide-angle zoom lens, professional XLR-type audio connections and many more high-end features.

JVC, meanwhile, is delivering high definition to the consumer market.

It won't be available this gift-giving season, but for the demanding home video enthusiast, shooting widescreen HD may be the ultimate in cool. The unit is expected to sell for around \$4,000 next spring.

Some consumer camcorders, meanwhile, don't record to tape at all, whatever the signal — they record to disc.

DVD-RAM discs hold a minimum of 40 minutes of the highest quality video; DVD-R discs hold 30 minutes. Thousands of high resolution digital still photos can be recorded, as well.

Recordings on DVD can be played back on most consumer DVD players, but they are not rewriteable.

Hitachi's DVD camcorders, such as the DZ-MV230A model with colour LCD viewscreen, start around \$1,400 and go



up from there. Other manufacturers have similar offerings.

Digital video editing systems

Like camcorders, there are hundreds of DV editing solutions on the market. Most are PC-based, designed for either Mac OS or Windows systems.

As such, you can buy basic editing software and a simple capture card priced together at less than \$200, or pre-built fully-loaded turnkey systems (anywhere from \$5,000 to \$50,000+); as well as extra hard drives for storage space, extra monitors and other system accessories.

Here are a few of the interesting editing tools available.

Editing software

Pinnacle Studio DV version 7 provides basic, entry-level editing functions, including the ability to add titles and music. With a compatible capture card, the program costs \$150.

Sonic Foundry Vegas Video 3.0 has more sophisticated editing tools, especially for audio. It comes with a DV codec and MPEG encoder, and supports a wide range of DV hardware boards. It's available for \$579.

Canadian manufacturer Matrox has long been a leader in digital video products. Its RT2500 package is a sophisticated editor, supporting up to three layers of real-time video editing, advanced editorial features, as well as MPEG output to disc or Internet. It is priced around \$1,500.

Apple's Final Cut Pro 3 is another powerful editing tool; it's used for desktop DV as well as high-end HD and feature film editing. Priced at \$1,499, now



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For the video enthusiast

continued from page 14

featuring real-time effects, offline capabilities, film matchback and much, much more, FCP has it all – but only for the Mac.

Avid Express DV 3.5 could be considered the cream of the crop. Long a leader in nonlinear editing, its powerful software brings tremendous editorial power and capability to the DV world, be it Mac or Windows. The package is for dedicated DV practitioners; it starts at \$2,699.



Cool software tools

Visual Communicator (www.serious-magic.com) is a fun little PC tool for creating streaming content. It's not for full-screen video work, but rather reduced-sized video windows on the Web or attached to an e-mail. The choice of output formats includes MPEG or AVI.

Two versions are available – a basic package, with CD and a 100-plus page instruction manual, for US\$99. The full package adds a green screen for chroma key effects and a microphone; it's about US\$150. The full kit lets you create

video programs that look like TV newscasts or sports shows.

Imagine, from Canopus Corp. (www.canopus.com), and *MovingPicture*, from StageTools (www.stage-tools.com), are software packages used to add motion to static photographs. It's the kind of technique you see a lot on PBS documentaries.

Imagine lets video professionals use high-resolution stills to create animated and keyframed pan, zoom, rotate and tilt movements in 3D. The output comes as an AVI movie, which can be used in most editing systems.

Imagine is available for Windows systems; *MovingPicture* is for Mac and Windows.

MovingPicture, now in version 3, is also a tool to pan and zoom on high-resolution images, with previews and editing software integration. It can also be used to output Flash files for Web-based use. Both products are priced at US\$199.

Digital Juice (www.digitaljuice.com) sells a number of cool software programs for DV editing, including animated backgrounds, special effects and other graphic ele-

ments. The US\$99 *Editor's Toolkit* includes over 300 such objects (effects, backgrounds, overlays, etc. on CD-ROM) that can be used in broadcast-quality applications.

HyperCam (www.hyperionics.com) is a handy video capture software that records AVI movies directly from a computer monitor. The resultant files can be used in video presentations, demos, tutorials and imported into compatible editing systems. Text annotations, sounds and screen notes can be added. Frame rate and compression quality can be set prior to capture. A single seat license is only US\$30.

This next gift idea is not software, but after working at your computer all day with these other suggestions, you may need Tiggon Corporation's *ScreenArena* (www.tiggon.com).

It is an attachment for the front of a traditional CRT monitor, adding a whole new meaning to "computer desktop." It

has adjustable storage compartments for personal items, pens, pencils and the like, and a flat surface for posting notes and reminders.

ScreenArena is available in three colors and can be attached to virtually any 17-inch CRT monitor. It has a suggested retail price of US\$34.99.

DV accessories and stocking stuffers

First you need a stocking for your goodies.

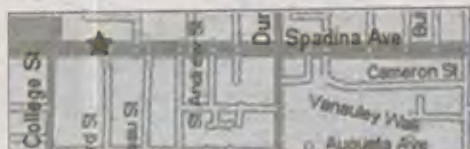
Cool-Lux recently introduced its Utility Pack, which should do well. It's lightweight, made from rugged Cordura nylon and comes with Velcro-closed front flap that covers up handy netted compartments and exterior pockets.

OK, it's not a stocking – more like a half vest, worn across the upper body or in gunslinger fashion, around the hips. The Utility Pack is priced at US\$29.

PortaBrace (www.portabrace.com) also has a number of great padded pouches, camera bags and accessories kits designed specifically for MiniDV. The Waist Belt Production Pack (BP-3), for example, is great for carrying extra batteries, tapes, tools and cables.

DV shooters who wear glasses will be thrilled to receive a new iCuff (www.i-cuff.com), either the DV version for smaller camcorders or the Pro

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Gifts to make a musician smile

Gift Guide

By NESTOR GULA

It is easy to buy gifts for musicians. There is always something new that they need or something old that they need replacing. There are scores of acoustic instruments, especially in the percussion category, that make wonderful gifts – even for those that are not musically inclined. The musician who wants to record at home has a varied list of things they need and things they want. For simple stocking stuffers you can always buy a microphone, MIDI or standard patch cables (make sure they are good quality, they probably already have medium to poor quality cables), guitar bass or violin strings or whatever consumable their preferred instrument eats up or the aforementioned percussive/rhythm devices. More advanced musical gifts require more money and a knowledge of what is needed by the musician in question. What follows is a list of items that would be welcomed by most musicians.

Edirol UA-20

This compact unit serves like an all-in-one musical interface between your computer and you. It has a 24-bit AD/DA conversion (where A is analogue and D is digital) with analogue inputs and analogue and digital outputs, MIDI in and out and connects to the computer, be it a Mac or PC, via USB. This is a small unit, a bit smaller than a standard paperback novel, which comes in at a reasonable price of \$294. It derives its power from the USB port so there is no external power puck and it is quite light – it was designed for traveling musicians to attach it to a laptop. Once installed, the UA-20 works with most digital music studio software packages. You can plug in your guitar, microphone (you will need an XLR to 1/4"



adapter because the UA-20 does not have an XLR input), MIDI equipment and the UA-20 will digitize everything, at a sample rate of 44.1 kHz, and send it to your computer. A nice feature is the input level control knob mounted on the surface and the headphone jack and volume control that is found on the side – these are very handy when recording. The system requirements for this unit are not great, a 400 MHz PC or 300 MHz Mac with not-excessive memory needs, so the UA-20 can be used by most anyone. (www.edirol.com)

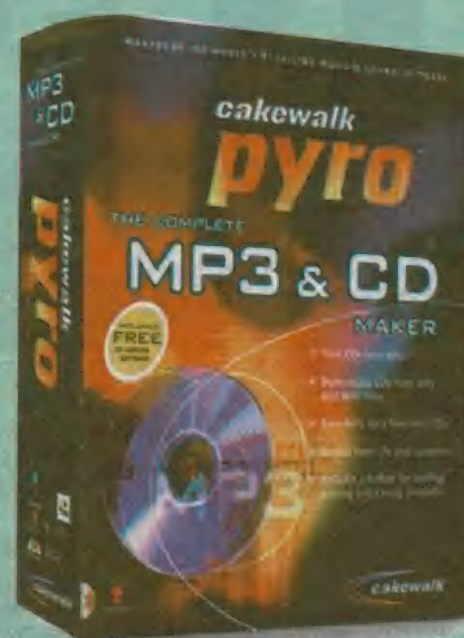
Yamaha Silent Violin (SV-120)

There are times when you are practicing an instrument that it is best that others do not hear you.

Sure it might not sound great – hey you are learning – but the sheer monotony of the repetition can drive most people batty. To alleviate these problems Yamaha designed the silent violin. Visually it is a stunning instrument. The black one I had as a test unit looked great but for maximum visual stimulation go for the coloured ones. The Silent Violin has a single pickup mounted under a standard violin bridge. You use a regular bow with this instrument. The chin piece, shoulder rest (that mounts directly into the body) and neck feel exactly like my regular violin so there is no need for me to get used to this "new" instrument. To properly hear this violin I have to wear headphones or plug it into an amp. There is a volume control on the violin. The sound is wonderful – like a regular violin. The addition of two reverb settings enhances the sound without going overboard. The controls, which are mounted on the underside of the violin, are straightforward and after a bit of practice can be easily manipulated while holding the violin under your chin. There is also an auxiliary in with its own volume control – you can plug in your favourite music and play along. Although not cheap, at \$999, the Yamaha silent violin is a proper instrument that will offer many years of enjoyment. (www.yamaha.ca)

Cakewalk Pyro 2003

If you are creating digital music and you have your own collection of digital music, chances are you will soon have MP3, WAV and WMA files strewn about in all places on your hard drive. Cakewalk's latest version of *Pyro* bills itself as a digital music manager. It makes the process of assembling music to burn on CD very easy. You can create really good mixes on a CD by overlaying and cross-fading various tracks – no more standard two-second pause between songs. With a simple EQ tool you can adjust the levels of all the songs so that there is no jump in volume from one song to the next. *Pyro* will let you rip MP3s



from either CDs, vinyl LPs and cassette and then clean up the tracks, usually the ones from the LP or cassette, using the Virtos Noise Wizard. *Pyro* also includes Neato's MediaFacII CD-labeling software to spice up the CDs that you burn. This easy to use software costs \$75. You don't need a super computer to run it either – a 300 MHz PC with 64 MB of RAM is the minimum requirement. (www.cakewalk.com)

PodXT

It is no secret that a guitar amp works best when it is set at close to maximum volume. This creates a problem when you are recording at home – there are other household inhabitants and neighbours. The best solution is to get an amp modeler that electronically mimics the sound of various amps. There are many guitar amp modelers on the market but the new PodXT from Line 6 has raised



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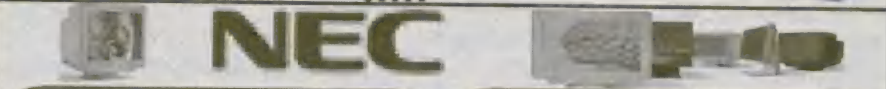
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For the video enthusiast

continued from page 16

version for full-sized shoulder-mount cameras.

It's a soft, cushioned attachment for a camcorder's eyepiece. It lets a camera operator put his or her glasses right up against the viewfinder while focusing and composing. iCuff slips onto an existing eyepiece, and is tightened with a velcro strap. The DV is priced at \$69; the larger size is \$109.

Ever been told to put a sock on it? Your camera microphone, that is.

The Mic Muff Windscreen (www.studio1productions.com/mic_muff.htm), available for DV camcorders such as the Sony VX-1000/2000 and Canon GL-1, provides good sound transparency while protecting the microphone from moisture, wind and other elements. It lists for US\$39.95.

Hoodman (www.hoodmanusa.com) has soft, protective viewfinder and eyepiece covers for a number of DV cameras; prices start around \$50.

And for the front of your camera, how about the Producer 3D camcorder adapter?

The Producer 3D Kit



(www.razor3donline.com/producer3dkit.html) captures two distinct views, resulting in a three-dimensional image on tape.

The camcorder adapter does not affect auto focus, exposure, zoom, white balance and other normal camcorder functions.

Thirty-seven, 43, 49 and 52 mm thread sizes are available on the adaptor; the unit is priced at US\$249.

Now that your camera is fully dressed, how do you take it anywhere?

The Super DV Camcorder Support is one way. The foam padded, over-the-shoulder device supports camcorders up to 13.5 kg (30 lbs.); it lists for US\$289.

A much more simple and inexpensive device



is the DVBrace Uni-Handle, a one-piece handheld support for lightweight camcorders. It screws into most camera mounts and costs a mere US\$11.

The SteadyTracker Xtreme (www.steadytracker.com) is a more sophisticated camera support that allows you to control tilts, pans, boom moves and camera-flybys. Smooth camera moves are easy to create, as are severe Dutch angle shots; the unit acts as a static mono-pod, and has a two-foot boom and one-foot extension, as well.

Priced at \$469, the SteadyTracker comes with optional monitor mount (\$59) and low mode adapter (\$149) as well.

If it's a simple tripod you're after, Velbon (www.velbon.com.au) has a fluid head product, selling for under \$100. The CX-586 is designed for light or medium use.

Draganfly (www.rctoy.com) makes a most unusual camera mount – a remote controlled helicopter, on which a wireless video camera can be mounted. With full flight controls and lightweight carbon fibre body, a bundled package costs around US\$750.

Filters are a big part of creative videography. Tiffen (www.tiffen.com), one of several filter makers, has a series of filter kits for DV shooters, including Video Essentials, Special Effects and

Film Look. Each is available in different filter sizes and comes with an assortment of diffusion, colour or polarizing filters as required. Kits are priced from US\$59 to US\$219.

Equally useful in controlling video colours and exposures are white balance cards; normally, they are white, but creative videographers know that changing the colour of a white card affects the video image itself.

Using the WarmCards System, for example, you can add richness to face tones, control colours under florescent lights and much more.

The WarmCards System (www.warmcards.com) comes with a selection of 6x10-inch cards, a set of pocket cards, a lanyard for carrying single cards and a zippered carrying case for the whole kit. The System lists for US\$65.

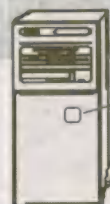
With all your cool new video tools, you may need to keep your equipment warm. Air-activated K & H Polar Heat Packs (www.portabrace.com) can help. These throw-away packs heat up to 130 degrees for more than six hours. Safe and odorless, they contain iron powder, water salt, activated charcoal and wood fibre. A pack of ten costs US\$11.

They also work well keeping your hands and feet warm; should be very handy during your digital video shopping adventures. ♦

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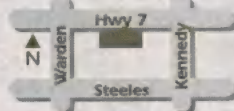
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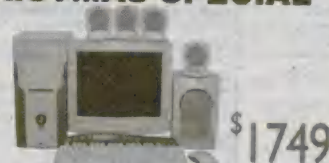


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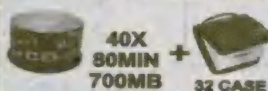


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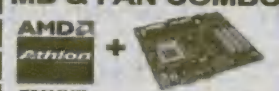


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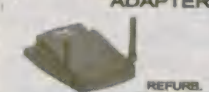
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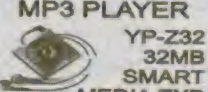
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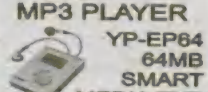
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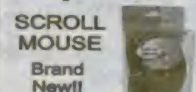
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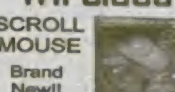
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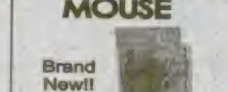
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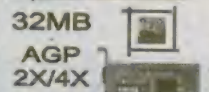
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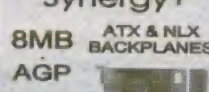
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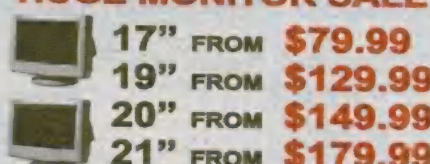
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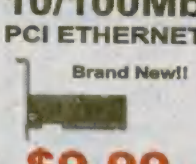
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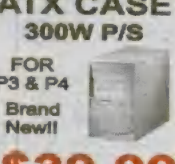
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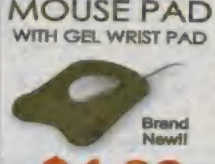
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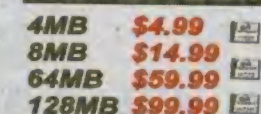
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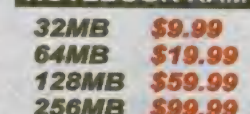
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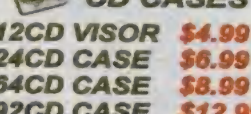
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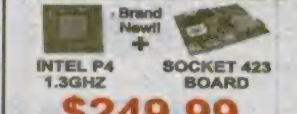
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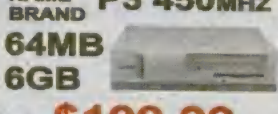
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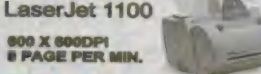
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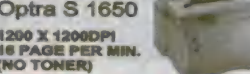
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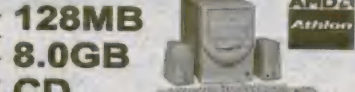
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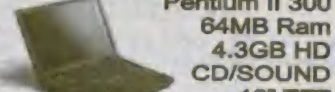
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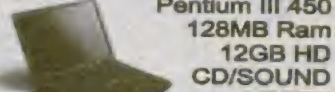
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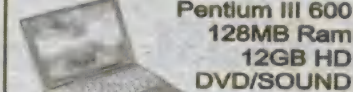
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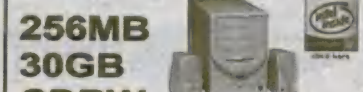
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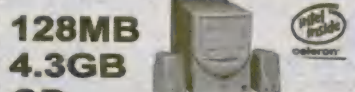
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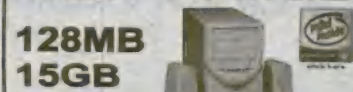
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For all photographers

continued from page 22

a lot of books out there on digital photography, two come to mind as being good starters.

For the beginner, there's *Digital Photography For Dummies, 3rd Edition*, by Julie Adair King. Available for \$37.99, this 329-page tome details the basics on everything related to digital photography. King starts with pros and cons of digital photography, compares digital to film photography, plus describes the basics of digital cameras and what things like "CCD" and "megapixel" actually mean.

As with most books in the For Dummies series, *Digital Photography For Dummies* is written in plain, easy-to-understand English and is filled with little tidbits of interesting photography trivia, as well as many useful hints for taking digital pictures, archiving images and making prints on a photo-quality printer at home. Many of the mysteries surrounding digital photography are explained in King's book.

For the detail-oriented person who wants to dive head-first into digital photography, you could always pick up a copy of *Digital Photography Bible, 2nd Edition*, by Ken Milburn, Ron Rockwell, and Mark I. Chambers. This 941-page volume covers everything you

need — or don't need — to know about digital photography. Dropping it on your foot would probably translate into a ride to the hospital. However, for amateurs who are serious about the art of digital photography or for someone thinking about going pro, you can't go wrong by giving them a copy of *Digital Photography Bible*.

A CD-ROM that includes photography samples and a trial version of *Photoshop 7.0* (as well as other programs) comes with the book. The price tag on the book is \$74.99.

Accessories

Still need more gift ideas? No problem. Every photographer needs accessories. Some accessories are cheap enough to be stocking stuffers.

Arguably, the most important accessory for any photographer is a decent tripod. While some high-quality tripods (like those from Manfrotto) can start at about \$200 and go up from there, you can get a tripod that will suit the average photographer's needs for as low



FinePix 2800 Zoom

Fujifilm
\$579.99

This 2.1 megapixel camera is a compact and lightweight model with one of the best optical zooms on any consumer digital camera. A 6X optical zoom isn't exactly the standard. At 2.1 megapixels, it's not really for the serious photographer or the pro, but it's a nice model if you just want to take snapshots that can be printed at the standard 4x6-inch size.

as \$30. Most digital cameras have a standard tripod attachment on the bottom of the case.

The price of memory cards depends on how much data they hold (measured in megabytes). They start as low as \$40, but high capacity cards carry price tags in the several hundreds of dollars.

If you really want to help out the digital photographer on your shopping list, a 128 MB memory card (make sure you get the right type of storage for his or her camera) is a good place to start. They cost about \$100. Sandisk and Lexar are common brands for memory cards.

A USB-based memory card reader is another good gift idea. This lets you pop in a memory card and copy everything over to the computer without having to connect the camera.

Some digital photographers swear by memory card readers, which typically cost at least \$80.

Last but not least, the gift of backup storage media will be much appreciated this holiday season, as the prices of CD-Rs, CD-RWs and other storage media will be affected by the looming tax levy. Prices of storage media will probably skyrocket by spring, so buying your favourite digital photographer a spindle or two of CD-Rs is a great gift idea. ♦

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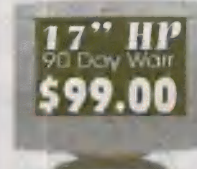
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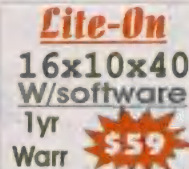
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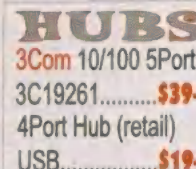
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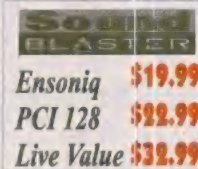
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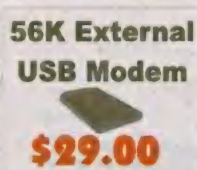
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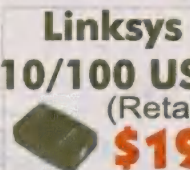
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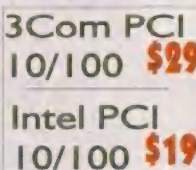
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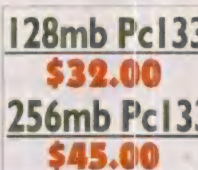
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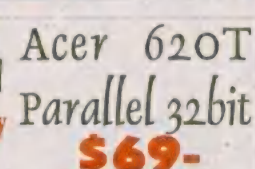
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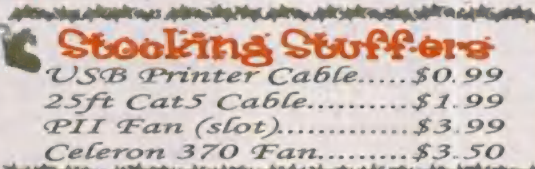
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Should police force your ISP to spy on you?

By BRENDAN WESTON

Canadians accept certain limits to our online privacy. Our Internet Service Providers (ISPs) keep our basic records, co-operate with cops and provide any customer data when a police warrant requests it. But this fall Canada's Department of Justice floated a chilling plan for ISPs to go much further. ISPs, it thinks, should install equipment that can record each individual's Web surfing, correspondence and instant messages to sniff out child porn viewers, adult lurers of minors and computer virus writers.

Some object that the Orwellian plan is costly when many ISPs are already struggling financially. Another concern is how nearly a thousand service providers will keep personal records ready for police but safe from marketers, for whom such data could be worth millions. But most worrisome is that the feds have neither made the case that existing laws hamper police unduly, nor said why we require less privacy when our communications are digital, not analogue.

Most folks expect cops to treat e-mail like a phone call, fax or posted letter, and to read it only if a judge says there's evidence equal to that needed to tap our phone or open our snail mail. A lesser test may apply to seeing a list of dates and addresses of e-mail sent and received, which is like a log detailing the destination and duration of calls, or Canada Post carriers noting the addresses on sealed letters. Perhaps ISPs could keep, but not release, such data while cops are waiting for a warrant, but anything more, in our increasingly digital world, would shatter any notion of privacy.

Strangely, the e-mail and postal mail parallel is not obvious to our courts or the justice department, which are unsure whether e-mail is, legally, private communication. The latter would

continued on page 30

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By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

The holidays are a good time to take your digital camera on a late night field trip and experiment with some nighttime photography. The effect of many hundreds of Christmas lights burned into a mostly black background, illuminating some of the area around them, makes for effective yet simple "artistic" photography. (Every town seems to have at least one person on a quest to outdo Clark W. Griswold — Toronto probably has a few dozen.)

Use Christmas lights as a jumping off point for other potential nighttime subjects. Some suggestions might include the proverbial overhead shot of the highway, fireworks or even lightning, if you're brave enough. However, there are some things to keep in mind to avoid the all-black look.

Camera

For night photography, we have to adjust the shutter speed to keep the shutter open longer than usual, to gather all available light. Otherwise, the end result will be a dark exposure with a few faint light points. However, some more basic consumer digital cameras don't give users the option to adjust shutter speeds. For the most control over the exposure, look for a "B" shutter speed setting. The "B" stands for bulb, and is a throwback to the days of handheld magnesium flashes. On the bulb setting, the shutter will stay open as long as your finger is on the button, which gives you more control over the length of the exposure.

Digital photography's biggest benefit — instantly being able to preview your images — is an obvious advantage here. Take a few shots, making note of how long the shutter was open for each, and adjust subsequent exposures to get the

Digital Shots: Nighttime photography

result you're looking for.

Another benefit of the bulb setting is that photographers can play around with the aperture settings to get the result they want. The higher the f-stop number (usually from 2.8 to 22), the smaller the aperture, and the less light will be allowed through, so the longer the shutter will have to stay open. The benefit of a smaller aperture is a deeper depth of field, meaning more of the scene will be in focus.

If your camera doesn't have a bulb setting, you will have to set the shutter speed as low as possible, and change the ISO and aperture settings to get the desired result. Setting the ISO as fast as possible, setting the f-stop number as low as possible and using the slowest shutter speed should give good results. Again, experimentation is the key to getting the effect you're looking for.

Equipment

Perhaps the most obvious piece of

equipment needed for nighttime shooting is a tripod. Because the shutter will be open for considerably longer than normal, even the slightest movement will give nighttime shots that blurry look we've likely all seen when shooting in low-light conditions. Resting the camera on a steady surface is also an option, but will dictate where the shot will be taken from. Shutterbugs can get a reasonable starter tripod for about \$30.

Another inexpensive accessory that cuts down on movement is a remote shutter release. Manual remote shutter release cables, which often screw into the top of the shutter release button, won't work with the vast majority of digital cameras, as there is no hole for them to screw into. The more likely option here will be an electronic remote control. Some digital cameras come with one and others offer it as an aftermarket option.

For shorter exposures, maintaining a steady finger on the shutter release button will suffice, but keeping perfectly

still (even with the camera mounted on a tripod) becomes more difficult as the length of the exposure becomes greater.

One option for relatively light, still scenes is to set the camera on its lowest shutter speed (two seconds or more) and use the auto timer that comes standard on all but the most basic digital cameras.

Waterproofing

When shooting in winter, as with doing night shots of Christmas lights, it is important that your camera be protected from the elements, most obviously, the falling snow, though if the past two winters are any indication, this might not be a problem around Christmas time. The other element we need to be worried about is the extreme cold. Digital cameras, with their LCD screens and rechargeable batteries, are especially susceptible to the draining effect of cold weather conditions. Users will also notice slower recycle times and shorter battery life in cold weather. Also, avoid moving between temperature extremes, as this can cause condensation inside and outside the camera body and lens.

It's probably best that you don't take your digital camera out in the falling snow, though fashioning a clear plastic bag to protect the camera (with a hole cut in it for the lens to see through) is an inexpensive and effective way to make shooting in these conditions a less risky practice.

Technique

As with all photography method and technique, learn what you can from books or online resources and take what you've learned out into the field. Adapt techniques to your own style and the final effect you want to see. Experimentation is the key. Pick a subject that looks interesting to you and snap away. ♦



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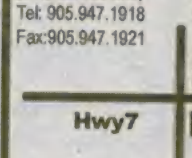
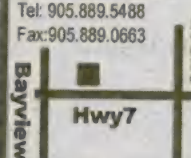
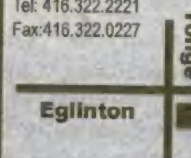
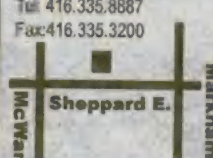
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Adventures in digital video: Plain or filtered?

By LEE RICKWOOD

Last time, we discussed jumping into the deep end by adding a sense of depth and dimension to your video compositions.

Because the TV screen is flat, videographers must create a third dimension by manipulating depth of field. Many of today's video cameras have some built-in controls designed to do just that — aperture (expressed as f-stops) and zoom lenses (set to wide or telephoto focal lengths) among them.

The use of filters is another way to control the video image. Filters can be built-in (dialed into place internally) or external, threaded onto the outside face of the lens itself (several sizes and diameters are available). External filter holders and boxes may also be used to mount several filters simultaneously. Costs range from less than \$20 to over \$100 per filter. One of the most common built-in filters is the neutral density (ND) filter; ironically, there is not much that is neutral about an ND filter.

True, it will not affect your camera's colour balance (more on that in an upcoming column), but it will affect the amount of light that reaches your camera, (exposure) and accordingly, the depth of field in your shots.

As we've said, depth of field is very important; it adds a three-dimensional

look to your shots. It forces the viewer's eye to focus on what you think is significant or meaningful in the composition.

Picture your subject standing in front of a building, for example. Detail in the building may fight with the subject, distracting the viewer's eye. But the separation between foreground and background (let's say they are three metres apart to start with) can be exaggerated by softening the background.

Putting an ND filter on the camera lessens the light getting in, thus opening up the aperture and reducing the depth of field. The background is softer, blurrier, while the subject is still in tight focus. A distinct area of demarcation separates the two, steering the viewer's eye to more important elements of the shot.

Adjusting a camera's shutter speed can also help reduce depth of field, in combination with other exposure and depth-affecting controls.

Arming the creative shooter

The creative and appropriate use of filters is the secret weapon in many a videographer's arsenal.

There are more than 140 filters to choose from; among the most popular are:

- Polarizers: Designed to eliminate unwanted reflections and darken skies.
- Graduated: Add colour to a scene to enhance a dull sky or add warmth.

- Pastels and diffusers: Ideal for portraits, still life and landscapes, to create a moody atmosphere and a softer effect.

- Warm-up filters: Add warmth to a portrait shot, giving improved skin tone and lustre.

- Spot filters: Isolate and frame specific areas of the composition, adds black, white, or coloured borders or edges, of different sizes and weights.

Many filters can be combined or doubled-up when used, so you don't have to carry all 140 filter types around with you. A fanny pack carrying your 10 most frequently used filters will do; two or three polarizers, a couple of star filters and diffusers and some spot filters of various spot weights and sizes.

Circular polarizing filters are used to increase colour saturation, such as darkening a blue sky so white clouds stand out. They also eliminate reflections from nonmetallic surfaces like glass and water. Polarizers can also be used to reduce softness in scenery caused by atmospheric haze; a top quality polarizer will not change the overall colour balance of an image.

Graduated filters, as the name suggests, gradually ramp from colour with heavy saturation to light, or none at all.

For example, a graduated yellow or red hue (sunset filter) might intensify the colour of the sky at the top of the frame,

but will not introduce any hint of colour on a person's clothes or skin tone near the bottom of the frame. A graduated blue filter could bring richness to an otherwise flat sky or deepen the colour of a body of water in the shot.

Special effect filters, such as stars or rainbows, make scenes sparkle and shine with brilliance. Use these filters to highlight metallic or reflective surfaces such as jewelry, automobile trim, musical instruments, etc.

Diffusion filters or other materials — nylon stockings, for example — can help soften the detail (as can the menu functions of certain cameras) of any video scene. They reduce wrinkles, eliminate freckles, obscure acne and visible scars on facial shots and portraits, making someone look 10 years younger than they are.

Modern digital video cameras can look too much like video, showing too much detail, too much reality. It's not a good idea to overuse filters, but using them thoughtfully and creatively can greatly enhance your video adventures. ♦

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Should police force your ISP to spy

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also like to keep a master list of every Internet account holder and force ISPs to record each Web site we surf. This is like listing each broadcast tuned, magazine subscribed, or book checked out of the library; acts that indicate only curiosity, not support, and is pointlessly intrusive.

Granted, in a rush to combat terrorism in the past year, the US allowed the FBI to trample over privacies once considered sacrosanct, such as monitoring who checks out which library books. Still, the idea seems to spring from Hollywood. (In the movie *Seven*, cops track a serial killers reference to a passage by Dante and find the culprit via an illegal library search.) In the real world, few want cops investigating a citizen's choices of channels or reading matter, online or offline.

The best intentions often fuel ill-advised and even counterproductive approaches. Sure, everyone hates creeps who release Internet worms, trojans or viruses. But if possession of such code is

illegal, how do software jocks write antiviral programs? With a caveat, later, a similar case can be made against kiddie porn laws in Canada, where cops have told activists who seek out illicit Web sites solely to report them that this

If we can justify suppressing child porn because images of a sex crime can further anguish the victim or family, the question then is: Can we ban such images without unduly limiting speech? The answer, for the US Supreme Court, is yes.

activity breaks the law.

Of course it's creepy to fixate on the sexually immature. That why it's easy to hope cops only nail perverts who would be "perps" and to pass ever stricter laws, like Bill C-15A this summer. Before this law, both sexual interference with children and making, distributing or pos-

sessing kiddie porn was criminal. It's now also a crime to try to lure one who appears to be a minor into a sexual relationship online or to transmit, make available, export and access child porn. Judges can now also order porn deleted

from computers or seize home or business equipment used in an offence.

Does that mean IT departments should spy on employees? No, but kiddie porn images found on a work PC must be reported to the cops. The new law appears to cover home PCs on Internet-based peer networks that exchange racy

images as well as MP3 songs. So will a judge seize your home PC because your file-sharing software helped strangers? Likely not, if only because most officers won't target unwitting transgressors. But rather than set out a clear principle, Canada relies on civil servants, cops and judges to ban or allow images or texts, case by case.

Trusting cops and customs officials to decide whether the work of Vladimir Nabokov or Robert Mapplethorpe is porn or art is foolhardy. Such vagueness is especially dangerous now that porn spam floods computers, and millions who don't think of children sexually are a click away from breaking the law, it's also unnecessary. If we can justify suppressing child porn because images of a sex crime can further anguish the victim or family, the question then is: Can we ban such images without unduly limiting speech? The answer, for the US Supreme Court, is yes.

The top US court ruled in April that images can be banned only if they arose from children being abused. Images or

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Musical Odyssey: Five keys to a good home studio

By NESTOR GULA

Years ago I was lucky enough to see Robert Fripp in a solo show. Robert Fripp is the founder and guitarist of King Crimson. He was on a relatively strange tour of southern Ontario university campuses. The show was strange because it was part lecture and part music concert. He would sit there and play his guitar, (Fripp doesn't sing), using tape loops and effect boxes to create a layered sonic atmosphere and then put the guitar down and lecture like a regular university professor. This pattern repeated itself a bunch of times. In his "lecture" bits Fripp touched on many themes - discipline, training, fame, fashion - but his main focus was always music. One thing that I really carried out of this show was a story he told about a guy who stayed in his house learning how to play guitar. This person would memorize riff after guitar riff. Fripp said that this person had his whole room full of riffs so much so that he could not open the door to let any music in.

In a creative environment it is essential that the equipment not get in the way of the creativity. In a home studio you are balancing various bits of technology, be they a computer or a musical instrument,

together to form a harmonic whole. The key is not to have all the technological bits you can get but to have everything working in harmony. For most it is much more pleasant to be recording musical tracks than fiddling with the settings on a computer or re-routing cables. A home studio is a place for recreation but it is also a place for work so it has to be comfortable and inviting while at the same time practical and efficient.

1 Stable computer system

The nice thing about a tape-based recording system was that it always worked. Sure a computer gives you greater and easier control, and often unlimited tracks, but a tape recorder never crashes. It is self-apparent that you should have as good a system as you could possibly get to record music. If you only have one system in the house and it is used for other things such as games, surfing, homework or finances, it might be a good investment to get a removable hard disk system and keep one system disk reserved for your music applications and another one for your other computer needs.

2 Familiar equipment

Along with a stable system you

should not be experimenting with new equipment too much before you start recording some music. Although in some instances a new piece of equipment or software will inspire you in some way, these are rare occurrences. Many new pieces of equipment or software have a high learning curve, this is especially true if you want to incorporate this new technological marvel into your present environment. It is best to separate the time of creativity from the time you need to learn to use a new piece of equipment.

3 Good microphone

Goes without saying. Unless you are creating straight electronic music that will have absolutely no input from the analogue world, you need a decent microphone. If you think that the "PC microphone" will do the trick you are wrong. Investing in a decent microphone, like the classic Sure SM58 that goes for about \$170, will pay dividends for years to come.

4 Cabling and connectivity

Buy good quality cables. It is incredible that people will spend thousands of dollars on first rate equipment and then buy the cheapest cables they can. I have

been guilty of this. Buy good quality cables and take care of them, storing them properly when not in use. No matter how hard you try you will always have a mess of cables at some point in your home studio. At times this was a crisis of biblical proportions in my case. The way to deal with it is live with some of the cabling mess and be efficient in the cleanup and arrangement of all the cables. As well you will need tons of adapters - RCA, 1/4", 1/8" and others. You will not have whatever adapter you need, especially when integrating new hardware into your studio. That is just part of life and one of the reasons for not using new equipment for a pressing project or recording session.

5 Space

Organize your space well and you will have a happy time in your home studio. I invested some money, not much mind you, in guitar hooks and now my guitars and basses hang on the walls and not packed away in cases under the desk. After a lot of trial and error I came up with a solution where my musical equipment can live side by side with my home office equipment. Make sure you have space to move around - sometimes you just have to stand to play that guitar part right. ♦

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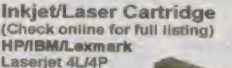
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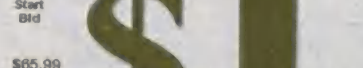
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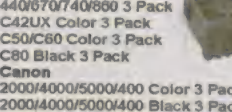
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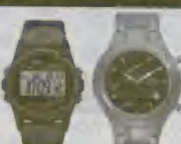
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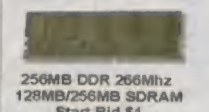
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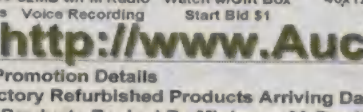
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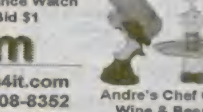
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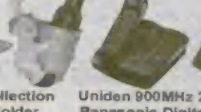
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Should police force your ISP to spy
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words with similarly base themes that spring from the imagination, whether written, drawn or computer-animated, are a form of speech that deserves protection. "The government cannot constitutionally premise legislation on the desirability of controlling a person's private thoughts," wrote Justice Anthony Kennedy for the court in *Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition*. "Virtual child pornography is not 'intrinsically related' to the sexual abuse of children."

The idea images cause child abuse is

ISPs, it thinks, should install equipment that can record each individual's Web surfing, correspondence and instant messages to sniff out child porn viewers, adult lurers of minors and computer virus writers.

plausible, but there is no evidence for it, or for other once-common views like adult porn leads to rape, pot to heroin use and adultery-themed novels straight to hell. There's also contrary data. In the US, where most kiddie porn is posted and viewed, child abuse fell 30% in 10

years opposite to the Net porn surge, according to a study by the University of New Hampshire-affiliated Crimes Against Children Research Center.

We have a lazy impulse to blame strangers, artists and media instead of pointing closer to home. As recently as

1999, two Reform MPs asked that the classic novel *Lolita*, which has twice been made into a movie, be banned from the library of Parliament. Yes, real child porn is vile. It's worse than fiction and computer-generated depictions of

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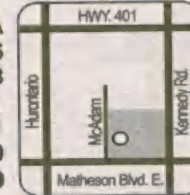
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abused kids which may also be creepy, though this may be the point.

But ugliest of all is the fact that the vast majority of child sexual abusers are relatives, neighbours and people already close to the child, not strangers or Net lurers. Already, one California firm says its software can distinguish virtual kiddie porn from the real stuff to enforce a narrow ban.

It compares posted porn to an extensive digital database of kiddie porn from police investigations and traces the tell-tale Internet Protocol address of transgressors. And the Canadian Supreme

Court, which exempted private drawings and journals from the kiddie porn laws, could clarify matters with a similar distinction.

Police clearly need thoughtful direction more than the leashless policy the justice department is planning.

This month, when Ontario gave Toronto police chief Julian Fantino an extra \$2 million to train cops to counter Internet crimes against minors, Fantino used the podium to lambaste our Supreme Court exemption. And there's scant hope that cops on this beat will enlighten their boss on discerning

thought from action.

In the UK this month, ISPs rejected their government's request to voluntarily hold data, including Web sites visited, records of e-mail recipients, lists of

numbers dialed and locations of mobile phones when switched on, for up to two years in case it interests later investigations. Canadians and their ISPs must do likewise. ♦

Gifts to make a musician smile continued from page 17

the bar for the competition.

There are 32 legendary and classic amp models with 22 cabinet (speaker) and four microphone models. As well there are 49 stompbox and studio effects and a chromatic tuner thrown in for

good measure. The great thing about the PodXt is that it digitizes whatever you are playing and connects directly to the computer via USB cable. It has flash-based memory for upgradability and MIDI in and out connectors. This great unit will set you back \$576. (www.line6.com) ♦

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Kevin Linfield

Linfield's
Line

Linux and online banking

One thing that Canadian computer users do more than their American counterparts is online banking. Although Linux is often thought of as a business operating system, more and more people are using it on their home machines. So let us take a look at using a Linux-based computer to access your banking information.

Why bank online?

No matter what operating system you run, online banking offers many advantages over going to your regular bank. You can pay bills, move your money, balance your cheque book, order mutual funds, contribute to your RRSP and obtain transaction histories (often downloadable in *Quicken* or *MS Money* format) at any time; 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Except for deposits and withdrawals, you really don't ever have to visit your branch.

That was then

When I started computer banking, most financial institutions had not stan-

dardized access methods. Instead of using the Internet and a Web browser, many banks required you to access their servers with special Windows-only software, which would use your modem to dial into their servers.

When the Internet started to gain momentum, you could at least access the bank's servers from your Internet connection, but you still had to use proprietary Windows software. Finally, banks allowed users to access their accounts with standard Web browsers. Sounds easy, right? Yet when I first started using Linux, I had very limited success doing any banking online. The only big-named browser was *Netscape Navigator*, and it lagged many versions behind the ones for Windows and Mac OS. Hence, most of my banking was done under Windows, although I did have limited success under Linux with one of my bank accounts.

This is now

The good news is that all major Canadian financial institutions now support at least one Linux browser. The best source of information I've found online is the "Banks 'n' Browsers" Web page, at www.starnix.com/b-n-b.html.

The data on this Web site is maintained by Evan Leibovich of Starnix Inc. in Thornhill, Ontario, and I spoke with Evan about the history of his Web site and why he maintains it. He explained that the idea started in the spring of 2002, with an exchange of information on the Toronto Linux user group mailing list. Over the years, he has kept an up-to-date list of what works and what doesn't, and has now expanded outside Canada to include data for 302 banks in 32 countries. Perusing his Web site, I was pleased to see my own experiences have been confirmed by others.

Why Linux issues?

While I don't think most banks intentionally made it difficult for Linux users to bank online, many of their Web sites are optimized for *Microsoft Internet Explorer*, which of course still doesn't run under Linux. However, some banks such as TD Canada Trust have actually recognized Linux and specifically state which browser will work (see www.tdcanadatrust.com/ebanking/sup-br.jsp for specific TD Canada Trust browser support).

Other banks are not so positive. Sometimes you have to fool their site

into thinking you are using a different browser. Some complain if they detect that you are not using *Internet Explorer* or *Netscape Navigator*, but you can often trick them if you tell your browser what identification string to report.

Some bank Web sites report JavaScript errors, which may require you to manually edit a configuration file or require you to skip the initial startup page and directly access the login prompt.

Choices of browsers

Gone are the days when *Netscape Navigator* was your only choice. Now there are at least eight different browsers, including *Mozilla*, *Galeon*, *Konqueror*, *BrowseX*, *Opera*, *Lynx* and *Elinks*. Most Linux users have standardized on *Mozilla* or *Konqueror*, depending on which desktop they run. My personal preference is *Opera* (www.opera.com) because it is fast, customizable and not a memory hog. It does cost US\$39, but I feel it is well worth it. But no matter which browser you run, you should be able to perform your banking online.

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Possible futures are always fun to explore – especially if they inform the present we're living in.

That's one of the reasons I've long been a big fan of the novels of William Gibson, a Vancouver-based writer who originally hails from Texas. Gibson was one of the founders (along with such science-fiction luminaries as Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker and John Shirley) of the cyberpunk movement.

Cyberpunk offers readers a whole host of guilty pleasures. It's the contemporary equivalent of the noir detective novels of Raymond Chandler et al., peopled by losers, low-life settings and anti-heroes as protagonists. It's usually gritty, fast-paced and stylistically tight writing. The world of cyberpunk is a world of moral quandaries, where, just as in real life, there are no clear, black-and-white solutions, and no-one's really the Good Guy. Best of all, though, cyberpunk is writing that's all about technology – and about how human

Welcome to the future

beings deal with the consequences of the technology they've developed.

The best of Gibson's work, in my not-so-humble opinion, is contained in his so-called "Sprawl" trilogy, which comprises the novels titled *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. In *Neuromancer*, which was first published in 1984, Gibson coined the term "cyberspace," essentially inventing the concept. Readers who have age on their side will remember that, in 1984, the Internet was in its very infancy. ARPANET, the precursor of the Internet, was starting to move away from its military and academic roots. The TCP/IP protocol – the common language of the Net – was in the process of being created by Bob Kahn and Vint Cerf. In 1984, the number of servers on the Internet exceeded 1,000 for the first time.

The real kicker to all this is that, when William Gibson wrote *Neuromancer*, he neither owned nor had used a computer. He'd read about them, talked with those who used them and thought beyond the present to a world where computers made the world go 'round. But what a world he created.

Case, the main character, of

Neuromancer ("hero" is definitely the wrong word), is a cowboy, a console jockey, who makes his living by jacking into cyberspace, the "consensual hallucination that was the matrix," in order to steal data for his employers. Or rather, Case used to be a cowboy – having once cheated someone who had hired him, he'd been punished in an appropriately high-tech way, and is, at the beginning of the novel, unable to access cyberspace, a loss that he feels more keenly than any hard drug withdrawal. The story is about his chance to get back in the action in a big way. Along the way, he gets involved in economic espionage, a family business made up of generations of clones, and a leap in the evolution process of artificial intelligence, which has immense implications.

But it's the reflection of our present world, and the novel's implications of our possible futures, that makes it worth reading and re-reading.

It's been 17 long and interesting years since the publication of *Neuromancer*. Personal computers are vastly more complex and powerful than the 386, 32-bit machines that were the norm in 1984. And the Internet? Well, the Net has become commonplace (for most of

us, anyway – it must be noted that Net access is a privilege currently reserved for relatively few of the world's inhabitants). You surf, I surf, even octogenarians in Yellowknife surf. We have near-instant access to databases of information that would have made researchers even 25 years ago swoon with envy. The Internet, much like the machines it's based on, has become an appliance.

But there's magic there, if only we give our imaginations a little free reign. Point your browser, click your mouse, and you're instantly in a different world. Time and space take on different meaning. Access is limited only by the user's curiosity, technical prowess and budget. There are, without a doubt, console jockeys and cyberspace cowboys out there. Hackers and crackers abound today – and who knows what high-level bandits are trolling the world's banks and financial systems? As for artificial intelligence, well, that's a subject best left to another evening around the cyberspace campfire, isn't it?

Alan Thwaites, a *TC* Contributing Editor, is a freelance journalist who writes about computer, communications, and business technologies. He can be reached at praxis@pathcom.com.



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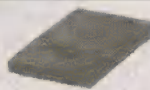
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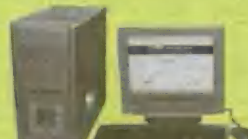
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I did something today that I have never done before. It was both exciting and satisfying. It was intense at times, but rewarding nonetheless. It took all of my heart and soul to complete. It has become my child, my work of art, my, my ... pièce de resistance.

I made a movie. I call it, "Tour of my House."

Through the years, I've always fancied still photography over videography. Sure, I've used a video camera. But I've never owned one, nor have I ever had the desire to buy one. When I'm old and can't remember my name, I figure that looking at pictures will be enough to keep me happy. Moving images will only confuse me. Well, all that is changed - I have discovered *iMovie 2.1.1* for Mac.

Now, anyone who knows anything about filmmaking will tell you that it's all about the preproduction. Phooey on them! Any schmuck with a couple extra bucks to buy a digital video camera and a Mac running OS X 10.1 or higher can

Lights, camera, iMovie

become the next Spielberg. For my sophomore effort, I used a Canon Optura 100 Mini DV. Yes, Mini DV is slightly lower quality than full-blown DV, but still about six times the resolution of VHS. That's a whole lot more than any consumer really needs. Especially for a tour of my house. But that's not what this is about. It's about what to do with the footage after you've committed it to tape.

Since I am only a recent Mac convert, FireWire is still new to me. PC-heads still talk in USB terms. Sure it does the job, but FireWire (also called IEEE 1394) is even faster than USB 1.0. Plug one end into the DV camera and the other into the Mac and be prepared for magic. I started up iMovie, chose the name for a new

project, and was greeted with a blue screen. I panicked. Where I come from, blue screen equals bad things happening - but not this time. In big bold letters in the middle of the blue screen were the words "Camera Connected." Now that's cool. I clicked on the play arrow and heard the camera wind up and begin playing. Now that's even cooler. I was able to play, rewind, fast forward and stop the camera from my computer. Next, I clicked the big IMPORT button and voila, the Mac started recording the images from the camera. This was getting more exciting by the minute. I clicked stop to figure out what to do next.

"Timeline" is a common term when editing video. It is a representation of your project with respect to time, in a linear format. Now that I've repeated myself, let me try to explain in English. Every single image in your video has a time marker associated with it. From the days of film, this marker is called a frame. Thirty frames make one second of video (for those die hard video geeks, it is actually 29.97 frames per second, but that's another article). If you think of the videotape in the camera laying flat on the ground from left to right, you

would sequentially number each frame. This is your timeline.

Whew, now we can edit. Each time you started and stopped the camera during recording, the Mac will see that as a new clip. It will generate a thumbnail based on the first frame. Once you have transferred (ingested) all of your video into the computer, you will have a series of thumbnails, or clips, to edit together.

Knowing what we know about the timeline, you can drag your clips around to rearrange the order and make a coherent story, or in my case, a better tour of my house. You can add nice dissolves or the famous "wipe" between clips. You can also add sound effects or a complete music track from your favourite CD. The possibilities are endless. *iMovie* saves your finished video as a *QuickTime* movie (in a myriad of sizes and resolutions) so you can post it to a Web site, burn a CD or e-mail a short clip. All in all, I was amazed at how easy it was to put together a short flick.

If you'll excuse me, I have to go practice my Oscar speech for best new documentary and prepare for my next feature. I'm thinking of calling it, "Lord of the House." ♦



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ASUS PIPE LV/LV \$188/215
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ASUS P4B533/E \$179/229
ASUS P4B533GD \$223
ASUS P4T533C/R \$248/258
ASUS P4S97 \$185
Intel D845PEB2 \$204
Intel D845GBV2/L \$174/190
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Gigabyte 8MXP \$240

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ASUS A7V333-GD \$206
ASUS A7V333-E/R \$159/186
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A PC for your living room: Part 4 (final)

By BRUCE ATHERTON

Our HTPC is almost ready. All we have to do is add the drives.

There are mounting brackets at the front of the case. Remove the left bracket by removing the six screws that hold it in place. Mount the DVD drive inside the bracket. Make sure the DVD drive will be the master drive on its cable by putting the jumper in the last position on the right.

Mount the hard drive to the top of the other bracket and make it the master by putting the jumper in the last position on the left. Connect an IDE cable from the back of the drive to the Primary IDE connector on the motherboard. A notch on the cable connector matches a gap on the motherboard connector, and the notch on the cable connector at the other end faces up when connecting to the drive. Attach a power connector from the power supply to the hard drive. Replace the bracket containing the DVD drive and screw it back into place.

Connect the DVD drive to the motherboard with another IDE cable, this time using the Secondary IDE connector on the motherboard. Attach a power connector to the DVD drive. For maximum cooling effect from the fans, try to arrange the cables so that they lie flat without obstructing airflow in the case.

The DVD drive requires another cable to be connected from the drive to the motherboard, one to carry CD audio to the soundcard. You could connect it to the video card instead, but you would need a different cable than the one supplied.

Screw the support bar back in place

and replace the cover.

What a tangled web we weave

Lastly, we connect the audio and video to the outside world. Here is how my system is connected.

Video card:

- Input block to "Out to VCR" on A/V receiver
- CATV to cable signal
- Output block
 - S-Video to "DVD" on receiver
 - S/PDIF to audio card
 - Line out to audio card Analog in (with adapter)
- SVGA to external monitor

Audio card:

- Analog in to video card Line out
- Analog out L/R - ignored
- S/PDIF input to video card S/PDIF
- S/PDIF output to receiver S/PDIF input

Other:

- Ethernet cable to motherboard port
- Logitech transmitter to keyboard and mouse PS/2 ports
- Video card remote receiver to USB plug
- Power cable to wall outlet

We have liftoff

And now, the moment we've all been waiting for: Turn on the external monitor and hit the power button on the PC.

If everything has gone according to plan, you should see the BIOS come up. Press the delete key while booting so that you can go into the BIOS setup screens. You may want to tinker with these values, depending on your level of expertise. For now, we want to adjust it so that: a) the time is set correctly, b) the

DVD drive (called the CD Drive here) can be booted from, and c) no floppy drive is looked for.

Once you have saved these settings, we are ready to install an operating system. You should install the one you are most comfortable with that supports this hardware. That means no Windows 95, though Windows 98 Second Edition would probably work.

I chose Windows XP for its greater compatibility with this bleeding edge hardware, despite the onerous product activation Microsoft has foisted on users. Some may wonder why I didn't choose Linux or one of the BSDs instead. Given the availability of open-source solutions, I'm sure that eventually I could have created a perfect solution that way, but all of the hardware that went into this PC came bundled with Windows software that did the right thing as soon as it was installed. So for the sake of simplicity, my choice for right now was a Windows OS, although I left myself a Linux partition for future development.

I won't lead you through the process of installing the operating system or the other software that came with the hardware. I would urge you to visit the Web sites of both the hardware and software vendors and get the latest versions of everything - drivers and applications.

After your machine is up and running, you may want to run burn-in tests to ensure that there are no overheating problems. You may also want to get software that monitors the internal temperature. See the links section for examples.

Sure it looks nice, but what does it do?

With everything configured properly,

you should now be able to perform all the wonders I mentioned in the first part of the series.

This box has become an indispensable

continued on page 43

more INFO

Here are links to the latest drivers and some software that will come in handy for your HTPC.

ATI Drivers for the Radeon 7500 All-In-Wonder:

www.atitech.com/support/products/pc/radeon7500/aiw Radeon7500drivers.html

Drivers for the Delta Audiophile 2496:

www.midiman.net/support/driversearch.php

Girdler allows you to control various software applications using whatever inputs you have available. Most interestingly, there is a plugin for using the Remote Wonder remote control. www.girdler.nl/

Not satisfied with AtiDVD and PowerDVD? Try Zoomplayer. It too has a plugin for the Remote Wonder. www.inmatrix.com/zplayer/

Or perhaps you prefer a DivX player that also supports the Remote Wonder. www.divx.com/

Winamp supports the Remote Wonder too, and is a great application for playing music. www.winamp.com/

Define new video display modes for the HTPC with Powerstrip. 64.113.35.210/ps.htm

Monitor the heat in your system. mbm.livewiredev.com/

Burn in your HTPC. www.sissoftware.demon.co.uk/san_dem/html/dload_x86.htm

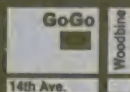
active-hardware.com/english/benchmarks/benchmarks.htm

www.etestinglabs.com/benchmarks/3dwin-bench/3dwinbench.asp

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www.matrixorbital.com/

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Santa's bag comes stuffed with software Gift Guide

By TOM VENETIS

With Christmas fast approaching, it's time once more to think about buying gifts for family and friends. As usual, there is a wide range of software programs that are ideal for wrapping and placing underneath the tree or stuffing into someone's stocking.

From imaging and digital photography suites, to office products, to tools for protecting your computer and your kids online, here's a look at a variety of software packages that make great gifts for the wired family.

Office suites

Whenever anyone thinks of office suites, invariably the first that comes to mind is *Microsoft Office*, and that certainly is not a bad place to start. The *Office* products have always gotten high marks.

Because *Microsoft Office* is so popular, information on the suite is easy to find. Instead, *Toronto Computes!* has decided to look at a couple of alternatives to *Office*: Sun Microsystems' *StarOffice 6.0* and Corel's *WordPerfect Family Pack 4*.

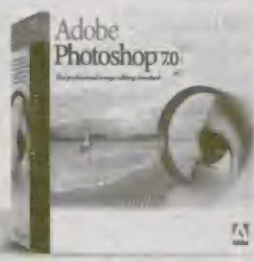
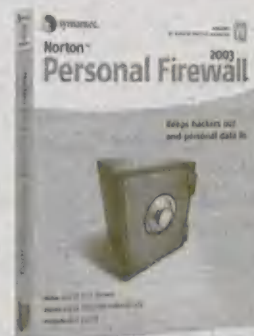
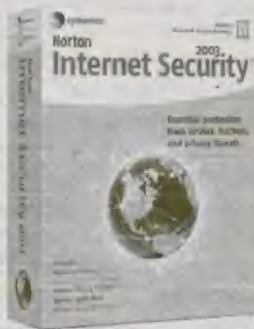
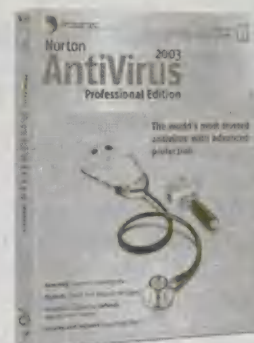
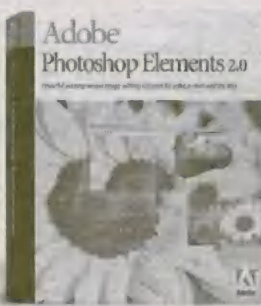
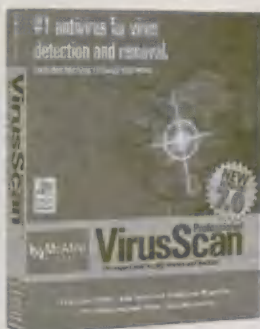
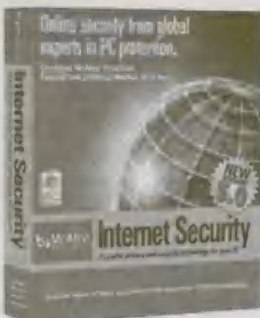
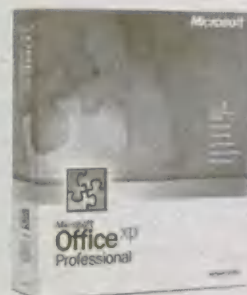
When *StarOffice* first made its appearance, much was made of the fact that it was free. Well, the free ride is over and consumers have to pay for *StarOffice 6.0*. But before starting to grumble too much, take a look at the price: US\$75.95. When compared to the whopping \$699 required for

Microsoft's *Office XP Standard Edition*, it is very much a bargain.

StarOffice 6.0 (www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/) offers all the basics expected from an office suite: *StarWriter* word processor, *Calc* spreadsheet, *Impress* for presentations and the *Draw* drawing tool. One of the nice features of *StarWriter* is that it can share and use files created on a variety of different operating systems, such as Linux and Solaris, as well as Windows. What is especially welcome is that *StarOffice* can run on Microsoft's Windows 95 and handle files created on that operating system. Microsoft has essentially left Windows 95 behind, and anyone still using it must feel like an abandoned child in a Dickens novel. However, a major oversight on Sun Microsystems' part is that the package is incompatible with the Macintosh OS, so sharing Mac files is going to be a problem.

StarOffice lacks a proper database, Web tools similar to those in *Microsoft FrontPage* and various other Web solutions for online collaboration or sharing files to a Web-based work area. While some may see these missing pieces as a drawback, most home users don't really need these tools.

One feature that was sorely missed is the file recovery system built into *Office XP*, but not available in *StarOffice 6.0*. It should be taken into serious consideration



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Santa's bag comes stuffed

continued from page 41

if one is thinking about switching from Office to StarOffice.

Corel Corp. (www.corel.com) has always had excellent products that unfortunately have been overshadowed by the company's corporate troubles and its bruising fight with Microsoft. These problems have made some write off Corel's office products altogether and that is a mistake. Recently, Corel shipped *WordPerfect Family Pack 4* (\$119), which offers some basic office programs plus useful tools for a home with kids who are using the computer for both fun and school.

Family Pack 4 comes with Corel's *WordPerfect 10* word processor, a nice upgrade from the previous *WordPerfect 9*, which sometimes had a tendency to hang or crash. *WordPerfect 10* is very stable and offers all of the functionality and flexibility that anyone could want from a word processing program. It also comes with a file recovery function and is backwards compatible with earlier *WordPerfect* versions, so older files should not be difficult to import and open.

What makes this suite most interesting is the addition of such products as McAfee's *VirusScan*, *Avery DesignPro*, a digital image editing program, and *Britannica Ready Reference*

Encyclopedia. These additions make a lot of sense for a product designed for home use and kids. The inclusion of *VirusScan* will save the cost of buying a separate antivirus program, and the encyclopedia is nice to have for young kids doing homework.

The *Picture Publisher* digital image editor is pretty basic, but provides the functions that most people want, such as cropping pictures and fixing red eye. Nothing fancy, but how many are really going to be airbrushing and fixing lighting or using layers on the pictures taken during a kid's birthday party?

Older kids will certainly find the *Avery DesignPro* tool a nice program, especially if they want to make labels for their CDs of downloaded music instead of doing their homework.

Photo editing products

With the increasing popularity of digital cameras, it's safe to assume people are going to be taking a lot of digital photos this Christmas. But once those photos of the kids opening the presents, thanking Mom and Dad, and then eating Christmas dinner are all snapped, shutterbugs may want to edit and fix them up.

Adobe's *Photoshop* is considered the premier image editing product on the market. However, while *Photoshop 7.0* continues that tradition and adds sever-

al new and useful features, many consider the program too complicated for the average consumer. Adobe has for some time recognized this problem and released a stripped down version, *Photoshop Elements*.

Photoshop Elements 2.0 offers most of the editing tools a photographer needs, including a wide variety of brushes, palettes and painting tools. The paint engine in *Photoshop Elements 2.0* is solid and anyone familiar with the paint features in *Photoshop 7.0* will recognize its overall look and feel.

Microsoft's *Digital Images Pro* and *Picture It! Photo Premium* are both squarely aimed at the consumer and are much simpler for first time users than *Elements 2.0*. Like *Elements*, both programs simplify and automate tasks for touching up photos, cleaning up red-eye, taking out imperfections and generally improving the look of photos that may be poorly colour balanced, lit or framed. *Digital Images Pro* includes a wide range of filters and effects similar to those in *Elements*, including the ability to add paint-like effects, filters, and text to photos.

Antivirus and firewalls

Whenever anyone purchases a computer, the first things they should think of installing are an antivirus program and a firewall. *Toronto Computes!* has

written enough on the subject of hackers and viruses that the reasons should be plainly obvious by now.

So with that out of the way, let's look at what two of the most popular security companies are offering.

Internet Security 5.0 and *VirusScan Professional 7.0* are both from McAfee (www.mcafee.com). Both are solid security programs that do much to simplify the steps needed to secure a computer from virus and cyber attacks.

Internet Security 5.0 should be given serious consideration, as it offers a nice set of security features, particularly spyware/adware protection and stealth program protection. Both protect against programs that track users' Web surfing habits and steal passwords.

McAfee's *Internet Security 5.0* was simple to set up, although it did have a rather peculiar feature. In order to install, it has to load up an installer program, then have the user reboot the system before it can continue with the rest of the installation.

Once installed, *Internet Security 5.0* allows for a great deal of user control over such things as password, file and folder protection, Internet access control for applications and programs, and management of Internet cache and cookies.

A single interface allows for quick access to each of these features, includ-

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ing the McAfee firewall program. The firewall program is easy to set up, offering a simple one-step updating feature and an immediately comprehensible way to see what programs are attempting to communicate with the Internet.

The firewall can be set to send an alert whenever a program is trying to access the Internet, allowing a user to set a rule for whether access should be allowed or blocked. This is particularly important, as many spyware programs will try to access the Internet to send information without the knowledge of the user. Also, the firewall provides a very nice network traffic monitor, allowing users to watch for port scans that can be signs of someone trying to get into a system. If someone does try to attack the system, *Internet Security 5.0* will issue an alert and even provide information tracing the attack and where it may have originated.

McAfee's *VirusScan Professional*, like *Internet Security*, offers a wide range of protection from viruses, Trojans and worms with an easy update feature for downloading new virus definitions.

A minor problem, and this is more an aesthetic criticism than anything else, is that the interfaces seemed a bit clunky, and the various functions and programs are not clearly apparent. McAfee could have done a much better job in present-

ing the various functions and capabilities more clearly.

That certainly is not a problem with Symantec's (www.symantec.ca) *Norton Internet Security 2003*, *Personal Firewall 2003* and *AntiVirus 2003*. The interfaces on each of these programs is smooth, improving on the already simple and cleanly laid out design that Symantec adopted with its 2002 products. Also, the installation and registration of the products has been simplified even more. Symantec must be commended for streamlining the various security functions.

As an example, *Norton Internet Security 2003* allows a parent to create a set of

security accounts, allowing for different degrees of access for different members of the family. By setting up the accounts, parents can restrict access to selected Web sites, newsgroups and programs.

Internet Security 2003 also comes with *Personal Firewall 2003*, which is greatly improved and streamlined from the 2002 version that was already a very good program to begin with. Users will most appreciate the automated detection of which programs are able to connect to the Internet and the ability to configure various degrees of Internet access for each program, either restricting access altogether, asking to be prompted each time a program tries to access the

Internet or allowing unrestricted access for trusted programs. It also comes with a one-button way of cleaning up a system's cache, cookies, Internet history and URL tracks that accumulate over extended Web surfing. And like McAfee, Symantec allows users to see where an attack is coming from, which can be fun.

As always, Symantec's *Norton AntiVirus* program is effective against a wide variety of virus, Trojan and worm attacks, but it now comes with a more effective script blocking function, most useful against e-mailed viruses.

So happy Christmas shopping everyone! ♦

A PC for your living room: Part 4

continued from page 40

part of my home theatre system:

- I regularly pause television while watching it;
- I watch TV or a DVD while browsing related information on the Internet;
- I watch the latest Internet-only movie trailers and short films;
- I play games using my cordless keyboard and mouse;
- Surfing through TV listings is even easier than with a digital cable box;
- I listen to music streamed over the Net.

One downside is that the interface is still more complicated than I would like, but I'm hoping I can fix that over time. Another slight annoyance is that it takes about 45 seconds for the computer to boot before I can play a CD or DVD. I think the benefits outweigh these issues, though.

Whither HTPC?

I'm happy with what the HTPC does for me, but I'm not through with it yet. I have a few changes planned for the future.

For example, the metal slots in the

case that cover the fans create too much noise. I'll be taking a Dremel to them and using wire grills instead.

Also, I plan to add a vacuum fluorescent display (VFD). This can display track number and elapsed time on a CD, or even downloaded song titles and television program descriptions. The possibilities go on and on because it is fully programmable.

Finally, I am considering adding cordless game controllers.

If you've been building along with me, I hope you enjoy your HTPC as much as I enjoy mine. ♦

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AMD DURON 1300	89
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SOCKET A	
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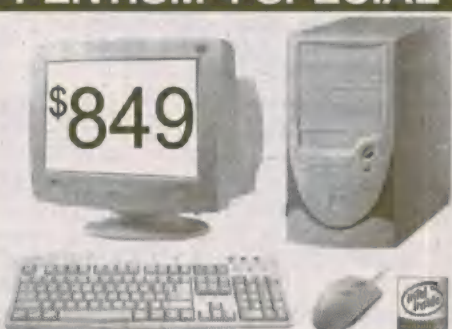
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 - Microsoft Windows XP HOME (CD/OEM)
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		ASUS P4550	ASUS P4550	ASUS P4550	ASUS P4550	ASUS P4550
		(256MB DDR/350W)	(256MB DDR/350W)	(256MB DDR/350W)	(512MB DDR/350W)	(512MB DDR/350W)
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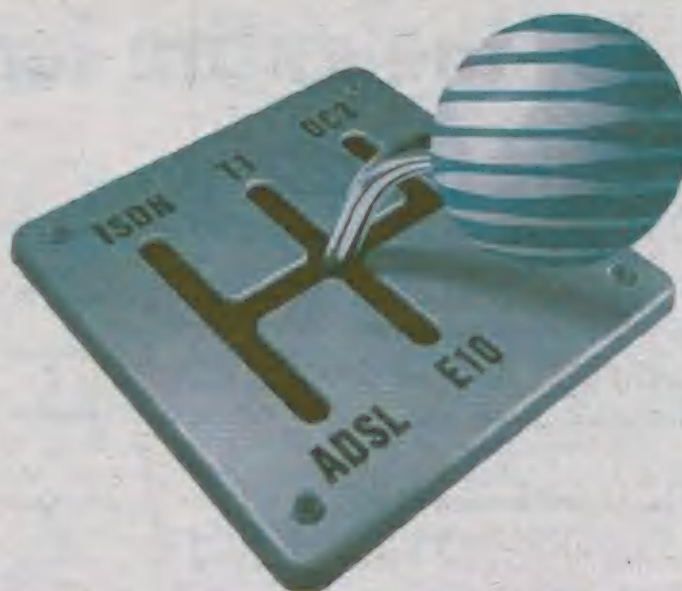
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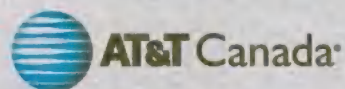
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Making a list ... for the entire family Gift Guide

By MARA GULENS

For my youngest sister it was Merlin, a handheld kids' game she'd even play in bed. For my spouse — Scott Mueller's *Upgrading and Repairing PCs* — a computer bible that holds all the answers to so many questions most of us would never dare ask. For my nephew — the occasional afternoon visit to our place, so he can sit down and go through as many computer games as humanly possible in the allotted time frame. For my daughter — the Weemote, a kids' remote that lets her switch between five preprogrammed TV channels.

Those are examples of some technology-related gifts that worked. They were the right thing for the right person, and ended up being used over and over.

As you seek out the perfect tech toy, remember to match the gift with the recipient. Just because reviewers rave doesn't mean everyone will like it, or that it will fit a particular scenario.

Case in point: I once gifted my dad with a John Cleese computer game, which to this day sits unopened on the shelf above his computer. (Turns out he had no interest in interactive games beyond *Solitaire* — no matter how funny the content). My nephew once received a strap-on Tonka playset computer game. Who knew my brother-in-law would refuse to use his corporate laptop for children's entertainment?

My annual list of holiday gift ideas has something for everyone — maybe. Use it as a launch pad for your own list ...

Barbie B-Bright laptop

For: Girls 3 and up

Price: \$69.99

www.barbie.com

Adults get the iBook, girls three and up who are into Barbie get the B-Bright laptop which, according to the creators, "provides a dependable and realistic introduction to computers."

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Five-year-olds can — and will — spend hours with this unit. Only problem is,



there's no volume control. So while theoretically the B-Bright is the perfect road trip companion, after about three minutes in the car most parents will be ready to throw it out the window. If your child has a separate soundproof play space it's the perfect toy for independent learning. Otherwise, sit tight and wait for the next version.

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Making a list

continued from page 50

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(hence the slippers) and you've solved all your problems relating to video storage, MP3 recordings, digital video editing, digital slide shows, and even gaming. In my case, I'm still not sure what part of the house deserves to have it all, but I can't wait to give it a whirl once it's available.

Mouse Elbow

For: Computer users suffering from RSI

Price: \$19.95

www.mouseelbow.com

This is one intervention I hope works

— and I keep strapping it on in the belief that it will. The Mouse Elbow is a brace you wear about 3 cm below your elbow. It's supposed help ease the pain and discomfort caused by too much time at the keyboard, and is available in various colours. You're supposed to think of it as a cane that helps someone with a twisted ankle.

According to the manufacturers (Canadian, no less), the Mouse Elbow "alleviates the pain by doing the work that your overused and ripped tendon used to do."

Microsoft is thinking computer users would prefer to have it easy — and their new version of MSN.ca is designed specifically with families in mind. The "Internet software subscription service" focuses on parental controls, advanced communication tools, a better browser and integrated home software.

What this all means is that everything you need is at your fingertips, albeit for a monthly fee. As a stressed-out busy parent I can attest to the fact that anything that makes the computer experience better, easier and yes, less scary, is a welcome gift.

New titles for the holidays

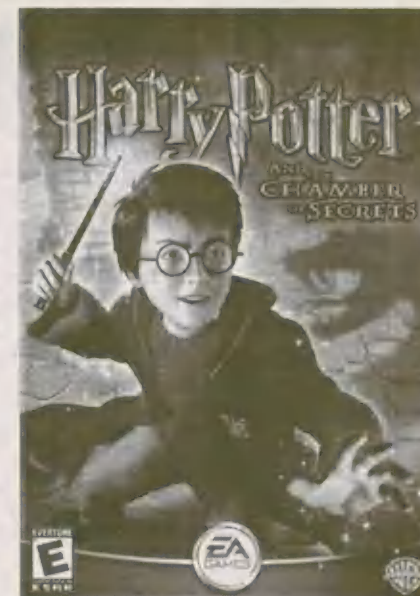
Dora the Explorer: Lost City Adventure (Infogrames, at www.funkidsgames.com) — Based on the popular pre-school TV show, this title promises to let kids take part in the story and interact with Dora. After losing her teddy bear, Dora and Boots journey through exotic locations and play fun-filled math games as they make their way to Lost City — the place where all lost items eventually end up.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Electronic Arts, at www.ea.com/eagames) — The PR folks promised me that flying on a broomstick will be much easier than in the first installment.

This game finds Harry in his second year at Hogwarts, entangled in a dark plot against his "Mudblood" classmates. In this version, players not only get to roam around the 3D environment, but also enter Harry's mind.

Nancy Drew: Ghost Dogs of Moon Lake (Her Interactive, www.herinteractive.com) — This seventh Nancy Drew mystery adventure has the teenage sleuth helping out a friend tormented by a pack of phantom hounds.

Apparently, the dogs have come back from the grave to protect the secrets of their master, and Nancy's quest is to discover why. According to Her Interactive, this game is different from ones that



went before in that "it is set primarily outside (as opposed to a haunted castle or mansion, etc.)" which makes it even spookier.

Zoombinis Island Odyssey (The Learning Company, at www.zoombinis.com) is the latest in the Zoombinis series. This one challenges kids in ecology, astronomy, mechanics and cryptography. If this latest "scientific-thinking adventure" is as good as the previous ones, then your kids will be racking their brains to solve the problems, and boredom will be a thing of the past. ♦

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Trading places with Barbie



By MARA GULENS

I've always wondered what Barbie does when she goes from being real (as in, a doll in the hands of an adoring little girl) to virtual. Turns out she tries even harder to be human — as far as that's possible. She wants to do the stuff the girls that own her do — or want to do — and in products like *Barbie Sparkling Ice Show*, that's possible.

But not only that. When the voice from the computer says "we," it reiterates the concept that Barbie could just as well be the player's friend, and that everything is possible for both of them — the girl at the computer included.

Which is a weird thing and somehow works. Try giving the game to a five-

year-old who is just learning to skate. She's going through the same process — learning how to balance on her skates, then learning how to go left and right, and faster and slower. With Barbie's help she can do it, while watching and being Barbie at the same time.

Which is not to say I think this product is a brilliant piece of multimedia programming. I wouldn't even go as far as calling it "creativity" software, which is what Mattel labels it, since the creativity is limited to choosing backgrounds and costumes, setting the scene for Barbie's skating show and learning/teaching Barbie how to skate. But then, that's just the kind of fun many girls at this age are after.

Which is the point exactly. Above all, *Barbie Sparkling Ice Show* is a clever response to what gets girls going. Girls like being Barbie — and all the more so if Barbie does fun stuff, like skate, but in an environment beyond their wildest dreams. This is not just skating on the arena around the corner; this is skating in Island Paradise and the Rose Garden. This is not just stepping onto the ice in a snowsuit; this is dressing up in the most beautiful costume and having an ice surface in a colour to match.

Strangely enough, the program is also somewhat entertaining for moms — even those whose years of Barbie-dom are far behind. There's something about progressing from level to level and finally even getting to skate freestyle with the music of your own choosing that keeps one going. You almost begin to feel like a little Katarina Witt. You think: Maybe I could even also do this on real ice?

But just like Barbie you'll have to fall and fall and pull yourself up again. ("Funny," I thought as I played the game, "last year I spent hours with Harry Potter learning how to fly on a broomstick; this year I'm learning how to skate. So that's where all my free time goes.")

That said, don't expect your sweet little somethings to come out of this having learned anything more than how use the arrow keys and press the space bar. Although, as an introduction to the wonderful world of all-that-is-possible at the computer, it's not the worst option.

The game starts with the typical sign-in, after which girls get to progress through various ice tours where they skate at the level of their choosing. Once they have done a practice session (com-

plete with double-Axels and various tricks) they can perform the routine in an ice show, which is where girls get to choose costumes, decorations and music.

After girls have gotten through the four locations, they get to skate in a "surprise location" (mine was up in the clouds — almost seemed like a session in afterlife), and they can also try out freestyle. As an added bonus, users can record shows to play back later, and even view their performance from a variety of camera angles, just like on TV.

Seen a kids' game you'd like reviewed? Send a note to: maragulens@yahoo.com. ♦

more info

Barbie Sparkling Ice Show
Ages 5 and up
\$40 (estimated price)
Mattel, Inc.
www.mattel.com

Requirements:
Pentium II (or equivalent) 266 MHz or faster,
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AMD Duron900 \$329 Duron 1.1G/1.2G/1.3G \$339/349/359 TB1.1G/C-P1600/1700/1800 \$439/459/479/499 Houston M758 MB or M810 128MB PC-133 SDRAM & Speaker 64M Video & 56K Modem (On Board) 20GB HD & 1.44M FD & 52X CD-ROM 16Bit Sound & Network Card (On Board) ATX MID TOWER CASE 300W Keyboard & MOUSE & PAD change Mainboard to Asus TUSI-M+30	AMD XP1700 \$479 TB1.1G/XP1800/1900 \$469/509/529 XP2000/2100/2200 \$539/559/589 ASUS A7S333 MB ECS K755A MB 128MB PC-2100 DDR RAM RIVA TNT2 32M 4X AGP 40GB HDD & 1.44M FD 52X CD-ROM & Speaker 16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem ATX MID TOWER CASE 300W Keyboard & Mouse & Pad change mainboard to ASUS P4B.....+80	AMD XP1700 \$529 TB1.1G/XP1800/1900 \$519/559/569 XP2000/2100/2200 \$579/599/629 ECS K755A MB 256MB PC-133 SDRAM RIVA TNT2 32M 4X AGP 40GB HDD & 1.44M FD & 56k modem 16X DVD & 40x12x40 CD-Writer 16Bit Sound & Network Card (On Board) ATX MidCase 300W & Speaker Keyboard & MOUSE & Pad change 256PC133 TO 512PC133.....+50	AMD XP1800 \$669 TB1.1G/XP1700/1900 \$629/639/679 XP2000/2100/2200 \$689/709/809 ASUS A75333 MB 256MB PC-2100 DDR RAM ATI Radeon 7000 64M tv out 40GB HDD & 1.44M FFD 16X DVD & 40x12x40 CD-Writer 16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56K Modem ATX MidCase 300W & Speaker Keyboard & Mouse & Pad change 256PC133 TO 512PC133.....+50	AMD XP1800 \$719 TB1.1G/XP1700/1900 \$679/699/729 XP2000/2100/2200 \$729/759/859 ASUS A7V333 MB (with new USB2.0) 256MB PC-2100 DDR RAM ATI Radeon 7000 64M tv out 40GB HDD & 1.44M FFD 16X DVD & 40x12x40 CD-Writer 16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56K Modem ATX MidCase 300W & Speaker Keyboard & Mouse & Pad change Mainboard to Asus P4533.....+50	Intel P4 1.6G \$909 P4-1.7G/1.8G/2G \$919/939/979 P4-2.4G/2.53G/2.6G \$1039/1129/1379 P4-2.8G/3.06G \$1539/1589 Asus P4T533-C MB 256MB PC-800 RamBus ATI Radeon 7000 64M tv out 40GB HDD & 1.44M FDD & Speaker 16x DVD & 40x12x40 CD-Writer P4 300W MidCase & 16Bit Sound (On Board) K/B & Mouse & Pad & 56K modem change Mainboard to Asus P4B533E.....+60
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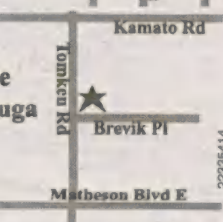
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All I want for Christmas is ... Gift Guide

By SEAN CARRUTHERS

... Digital audio!

Creative is the leader in the world of digital audio for the PC, thanks to its long history with the SoundBlaster, and now there's a new kid on the block — the Audigy 2.

The Audigy debuted to well-deserved acclaim, thanks to its audiophile-quality output and the fact that it was a nice easy way to add FireWire to your system without having to take up an additional slot on the motherboard. Now the Audigy 2 adds even more functionality, including DVD Audio playback capability and 6.1 speaker output. The card has a 106-decibel signal-to-noise ratio, which translates into exceptionally clear sound when you team it up with the right pair of speakers — any wonder the card was Dolby EX and THX certified?



to start bringing it into the digital age, XPsound's XP201 may be just the product for you. It's an external box that sits next to your PC, with inputs and outputs, a headphone jack and a gain control, as well as a

grounding switch that allows you to easily cut turntable hum without having to monkey with extra wiring. The bundle comes with Diamond Cut 32 mastering software, which makes it easy to clean up audio artifacts like hisses, pops and clicks.

(www.xpsound.com)

Once you've got all of your audio files on your PC, why not pick up a great portable MP3 player? Apple's iPod has been turning heads thanks to its amazing compact design, and it just got even better: It's now available in both Mac and Windows models, which means you don't have to buy special bridging software to use the iPod with your PC. The new iPod has the same basic design, but



Of course, Creative also has a full line of speaker sets, including the new Inspire 6600 set, which is a 6.1 configuration designed to provide the maximum aural experience when hooked up to your Audigy 2. Now more than ever, it's easy to forget about your TV and submerge yourself in audio and video right at your PC.
 (www.creative.com)

Of course, not everyone wants to forget about older formats of audio — there are still a lot of albums out there that have never made it to CD. If you have a large collection of vinyl and you want

but it's easily the best player around these days. Bar none.
 (www.apple.com)

... Cool graphics!

NVidia's GeForce4 series of graphics



cards has been the industry standard for high-end gaming for a while now, but it's now got some competition. ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro is one of the newest cards out there, and it's outperforming the GeForce4 by quite a substantial margin in a lot of 3D benchmarks. The fact that it's the first card on the market to support AGP 8X is a nice bonus; adding in support for Microsoft's forthcoming DirectX 9 is even better. The cards are running about \$650, though you can find deals if you look around. Because ATI is now licensing its technology to other manufacturers, you'll be able to find a wide assortment of Radeon 9700 Pro cards out there, including models from Gigabyte, Crucial, Hercules, PowerColor and more, and they all appear to provide the same excellent level of performance.

(www.ati.com, www.giga-byte.com, www.powercolor.com.tw, www.crucial.com, www.Hercules.com)



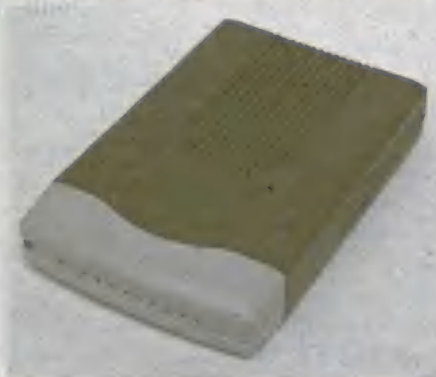
switches the scroll wheel to a solid state (non-moving) touch-sensitive pad, so you'll have one less thing to worry about damaging; it also comes with a new wired remote control. The new iPod for both Windows and Mac comes in two new capacities, both 10 GB (\$629) and 20 GB (\$799), which means you have far more space for tunes than you did with the old 5 GB model. Of course, as with other Apple products, you'll have to pay a bit more for this,



... An external hard drive!

External drives seem to be the new big thing now – who wants to spend an awful lot of time cracking open the case, figuring out what cables go where, and then reconfiguring your data and moving stuff from one drive to another? Just plug an external drive into an open FireWire or USB 2.0 port and you'll achieve high-speed data transfer without even having to get the screwdriver. It's the perfect way to add a lot of extra space for MP3 files, digital video or your extensive digital photo collection. You'll pay a bit more than you will for the same-sized internal drive, but the convenience may well be worth the cost.

There are a number of companies in the field right now, but the major companies doing this right now are: Maxtor (www.maxtor.com), Iomega (www.iomega.com), Western Digital (www.westerndigital.com), and LaCie (www.lacie.com). You can get external drives in sizes anywhere from 40 GB to a whopping 250 GB, so make sure to check around. If you have an old hard drive that you'd like to make external, there are a few companies making do-it-yourself external enclosures that will work with either FireWire, USB 2.0 or both: Canada's own Lava (www.lavalink.com) has a few down-and-dirty models that do the job at a pretty reasonable price. If you're looking for something a bit more stylish there's also the Momobay (www.dvico.com) line of enclosures, which are available for both desktop and notebook-sized hard drives.

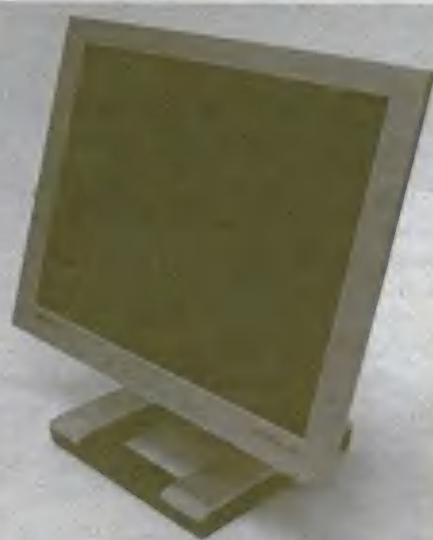


There are a number of other companies out there doing products like this, so check around.

... A new monitor!

With the way prices are dropping, it's finally okay to ask for a flat panel monitor for Christmas: Some 15-inch monitors are around \$500, and you can even find 17-inch monitors for under \$1,000. If you've got a few extra dollars to play with, you can pick up one of the new Samsung monitors with special design perks: The SyncMaster 152B (\$699) has a base that folds in on itself, allowing you

to flatten the monitor component against the base and then mount it on the wall, and even then you can still make use of the built-in stereo speakers. For a bit more, you can go for the Porsche-



designed SyncMaster 151P (about \$930), which not only tilts and swivels, the screen pivots between landscape and portrait mode to better suit the work you're doing – it also comes with both digital and analogue connectors and has a built-in handle to allow you to move it around fairly easily. (www.samsung.ca)

... A handheld computer!



Palm is still the most popular handheld going, and the company has finally entered the world of wireless with the new Palm Tungsten T. The Tungsten T is a convertible: It's a small device when you're only tapping on the screen, but the bottom slides down to reveal the Graffiti area when

you need to input data. The real selling point here, however, is the integrated Bluetooth component, which allows you to connect your Palm to other devices like cell phones, printers, access points and of course other Tungsten T handhelds (with Bluetooth you can now swap messages with colleagues in boring meetings without having to maintain a line-of-sight connection between the two). The unit is also the first of the Palm computers to sport Palm OS 5.0. (\$799, www.palm.com)



If you'd rather just have something cheap and utilitarian, check out Palm's other new offering, the ultra-basic Zire. It has a compact design, eliminating the expansion ports and the sync cradle in order to keep the price down. It does everything you want your organizer to do, however, including a calendar, contact list and all the other stuff you get with Palm OS 4.1. (\$169, www.palm.com)

Pocketop keyboard is a wireless PDA keyboard that communicates with your PDA via the infrared port. It comes with a folding keyboard that's about the same size as your handheld (maybe smaller) and a separate stand for the handheld to rest on (the stand clips onto your organizer by the stylus slot). The Pocketop is available in a few different flavours for compability with different types of PDA, including both Pocket PC and Palm-based models; see the company Web site for a full compatibility list. (US\$99, www.pocketop.net) ♦



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Stocking stuffers and gadgets

Gift Guide

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

For kids and grownups alike, there is nothing quite like waking up Christmas morning to find a stocking, hung empty the night before, filled to bursting with toys, candy and perhaps some more practical items like toothbrushes and socks.

When I was a kid, there seemed to be a pretty simple formula for filling a stocking; buy a bunch of school supplies and things the recipient needs anyway, wrap them in paper, throw in a few surprises and a couple of "key" gifts, hang it up and hope it hasn't been ransacked by the time morning rolls around.

There are a ton of neat gadgets that can be put into a stocking as key items, and this guide is by no means suggesting that you fill a stocking with lots of tech gadgets, as that would get pretty expensive. However, if you do decide to fill stockings with everything on this list, can I come to your house Christmas morning?

Please note that this list is not meant as a comprehensive checklist of small gadgets and stocking stuffers. Rather, it is a listing of some things we might like to see in our own stockings (hint, hint). While we did get a fair number of products in to have a closer look at for inclusion in this list, we couldn't realistically try out every product mentioned.

Under \$10

As might be expected, the under-\$10 category doesn't have a great deal to offer in the way of cool tech gadgets, but there are still some good stocking stuffers to be had in this price range.

Adult's stocking

Perhaps the neatest gadget under \$10 (though only just under) is a tiny key chain touch-screen data bank called, appropriately enough, the Touch Screen Data Bank. This little gizmo is fashioned to look like a PDA, though obviously it lacks the functionality of a PDA. It can only store 1.5 KB of information, which is equivalent to 90 phone numbers or reminders, according to RadioShack.



There are bargain-bin software titles to be had for under \$10, but these are usually older titles and often find their way to the bargain bin for good reason.

The bargain bin might also yield some older games with stocking-stuffer potential. In addition, there are a wide variety of CDs containing a few games designed to run on Palm OS handhelds that can be found among the as-yet-unsold bargain software.

An obvious under-\$10 stocking stuffer for computer users might be a box of CD-R discs. Some manufacturers have come out with a new take on the old CD-R concept with coloured discs and discs where the writable area is black. E3Works has gone one step further and fashioned 700 MB CD-R discs that look like a vinyl record on top and have a black recording surface.

Verbatim offers



\$10 to \$20



\$30 to \$50

up coloured mini-CD-R discs in packages of five for \$9.99, which are the perfect size for a stocking stuffer. These discs can only hold 185 MB of data as compared to 650 or 700 MB with a regular format CD-R.

Some cell phone accessories like the most inexpensive hands-free kits or plastic belt clips can also be had for under \$10.

Some cheaper carry cases for cell phones, MP3 players and PDAs also come in at under \$10; just be careful the recipient isn't getting the carry case for a gift he or she will be receiving later, as that might ruin the surprise.

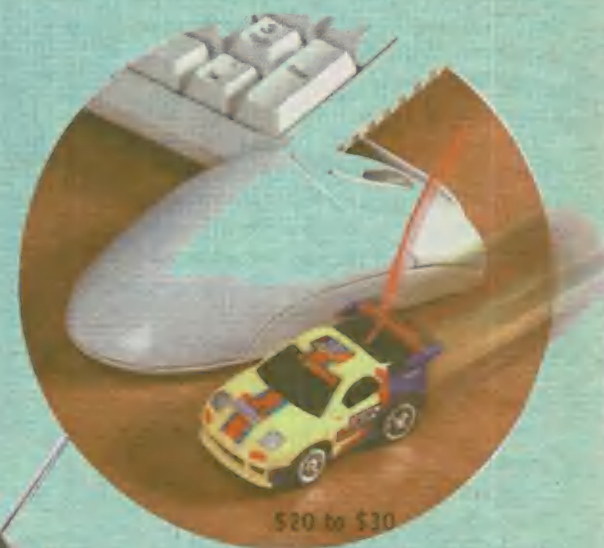
Other less exciting but functional items for consideration might be canned compressed air, for cleaning out the delicate innards of electronic components, or batteries to power all the batteries-not-included gizmos. For the neat freak in your family, perhaps a phone



\$20 to \$30



under \$10



handset cord untangler might help; this is essentially a swivel that plugs in to the handset so that instead of the coiled cord winding around itself, it keeps everything straight.

Kid's stocking

Again, we're mostly looking at carrying cases, bargain-bin software, inexpensive accessories and cheap electronics in keeping under \$10.

Hip Gear makes a Game Boy Advance accessory kit that includes a screen protector, rubberized side shock protectors and three interchangeable thumb grips that fit over the GBA's directional pad.

MadCatz and a few other manufacturers make light and magnifier accessories that slip over the GBA's screen, potentially fixing the dismal lighting of the handheld's impressive colour screen.

Cheap (operative word) handheld games sometimes come in under \$10, and might provide a few minutes amusement. There are also key chain *Tetris* and *Space Invader* clones for older kids, as well as wristwatch clones for younger kids.

\$10 to \$20

Adult's stocking

My personal favourite in this category is a mini butane blowtorch for the resident pyromaniac or cigar smoker in your family. The torch holds what looks like an ordinary refillable butane lighter without the flint wheel. When you press down on the button, gas is released out of the nozzle at the front, lit with a piezo electric spark, and shoots out a blue cone of flame.

Couch potatoes might find some interesting stocking stuffers that come in at between \$10 and \$20. Most obvious perhaps would be an inexpensive universal remote control for the technophile's stocking. Remotes that can learn the codes for usually five or more devices (DVD player, TV, VCR, cable box, stereo, for example) start at

continued on page 58



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Stocking stuffers and gadgets

continued from page 56

around \$15 for the most basic and generic variety, and creep up ever higher as more features are added. For example, an RCA touch screen universal remote we recently got in the office goes for just under \$180; not really stocking stuffer material, unless your last name happens to be Vanderbilt.

RadioShack sells an under-the-pillow speaker, which plugs in to a mini jack source and pipes the sound to directly below your head. Impractical perhaps, but part of the point behind stockings is to get the recipient things they would

never think to get themselves, and I think the Pillow Speaker would fall into this category.

Other possibilities include an ultra-mini landline telephone. The keypad element is about the size of a small box of wooden matches, though twice as thick. Users plug in an earpiece with microphone to talk and listen. These mini phones squeak in just below the \$20 mark and offer only slightly below regular telephone voice quality. However, we question the reasoning behind making a phone that will easily fit in a pocket, but must still be attached to a telephone cord.

Other suggestions include folding multi-tool pliers, a digital golf counter, digital pedometer, digital tire pressure gauge, or a 14-piece computer tool set, mini-tripods for the digital photographer and yet more cell phone accessories.

Kid's stocking

One possibility for a school-aged kid's stocking is a portable data bank. In keeping under the \$20 range, there are understandably few offerings. The highest potential storage on mini-organizers in this price range is 192 KB. Casio, Franklin (Rolodex) and Sharp. Another

possibility is a kid-specific data bank with diary features, a few games and some useful features like contacts, reminders, a calendar, and a calculator. Very small storage capacity organizers for kids can be had for about \$15, which is about the price of a plain calculator.

Disney Interactive recently came out with Princess Purses, which are essentially round plastic cases in the shape of Disney cartoon princesses like Ariel and Snow White. Each one comes with a CD-ROM game suitable for kids age three and up.

Mini-radios are another possibility, in the under-\$20 category. These mini-

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radios usually run on one AA or one AAA battery. AM/FM radios usually have a tuning knob to dial in stations, while FM-only models usually have a seek button, which skips the static and only tunes in stations that come in clearly, though how effectively varies with factors like location, make and model.

\$20 to \$30

Adult's stocking

Getting into the \$20 to \$30 range, we start to see some higher quality tech toys and useful gadgets.

Lower-end watches from the Casio and Timex lines squeak in under \$30. In keeping with the timekeeping theme, you can also get digital travelling alarm clocks that are higher quality than the cheaper ones, so they won't break the first time the recipient travels with them.

Less expensive optical mice come in at under \$30 too. Microsoft's IntelliEye two-button mouse has a scroll wheel to make navigating documents and Web pages easier and comes in just under the \$30 mark, while "house brand" optical mice can be had at the low end of this category.

For the gamer's stocking, we also find PC gamepads as well as some third party console controllers. While we're on the

subject, third party memory cards for video game consoles can also be had in this range. Also for the gamer, some console video game titles, most specifically, PlayStation 2 titles that are in the Greatest Hits collection, can be had with a reduced price tag of about \$30.

Kid's stocking

Spy gear has proved to be a favourite with kids. For under \$30, parents can get some cool gadgets that their kids can use to find out their most intimate secrets well beyond Christmas morning. A listening device with a mini parabolic dish and microphone, mounted on sunglasses, comes in at just under \$30. This device covers one ear, so why not fill the other one with the ear bud of a watch/walkie-talkie.

There are also mini RC cars that make it in under the \$30 mark. We had a Turbo Racer in the office for a few days and had a lot of fun with it. The Turbo Racer has pretty innovative packaging; the car is in a small plastic tube, with the remote control screwed on to make the container top. Unlike many mini-RC cars, this car-in-a-can has a fully functional remote with steering, forward, and reverse. Many small RC cars are the two function variety, where the user can choose to go straight forward or reverse

and to the left or right.

Again, there are some third-party console controllers and accessories that come in under \$30.

\$30 to \$50

We're going to cut this list of stocking stuffer suggestions off at \$50, as even this is a little high for gifts that are, after all, being jammed into a sock.

Adult's stocking

Some of the less expensive pay-as-you-go cell phones make it into this category, though on the high end. In keeping with communications, family radio service (FRS) handsets like the Motorola T5320 can be had in singles for just under \$50. However, if you're not a stickler for original packaging, you'd be better off getting the two pack for \$80 and splitting them between stockings. One walkie-talkie isn't much good on its own anyway. These radios can prove handy at the cottage, on a camping trip or just on a family outing. Users can select from 14 frequencies and these radios have a best-case-scenario range of 3.2 km. In the city, expect less than half that.

For the technophile with a desk cluttered with cameras, mice, PDAs and any number of other USB devices, inexpen-

sive four port USB hubs, like Cicero's hub, make it in on the low end of this scale at about \$35.

The Cicero hub can either draw power from the USB port it is plugged into, or users can attach the power adapter if needed.

Other possibilities include DVD movies, PC games that are at least a few months old, very basic digital cameras, Web cams, very basic MP3 players like Jam Studio's 16 MB JamP3 and less expensive PDA keyboards.

Kid's stocking

If your kid has a Game Boy Advance, the most obvious choice in the under-\$50 category could well be a GBA game. Quality digital and analogue watches also make it in under this heading. There are also some standalone handheld games, which will offer more appeal than those mentioned in the under-\$10 category.

VTech makes an inexpensive cordless phone with a translucent plastic shell in a variety of colours that would fit the bill for a teenager's room. The phone and docking base would likely be a bit too big for smaller stockings, though if you're spending just under \$40 on one item for the stocking, perhaps it's a good thing that it will take up some space. ♦

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Give the gift of Mac Gift Guide

By DWAYNE R. BROWN

Here we go again – the merriest season of them all. A time when giving is surely better than receiving. And giving in the modern age can go on and on and on. It seems that every day there are new toys for the Macphile out there. How could you possibly choose? What would the Mac in your life most like? Well, I've tried to boil it down to a few of the coolest things that I've found in recent months. From the affordable stocking stuffer to the "can I really afford this?" And the best thing is, every one of these items is available online. You don't need to make a last minute dash to the mall and bother with all the crowds. Just turn on the Mac, and click your way to Christmas bliss.

Okay, those who have never had their hand fall asleep while holding on to the mouse, raise your arm. You can't, can you? That's because there's a lot more muscles being used to surf than you think. There are plenty of palm rests, side tables and other accessories to try and make the computing experience a more comfortable one. Rocket Mouse takes it one step further by getting your hand, wrist, elbow and arm right off the desk. This clever trackball/mouse design is extremely comfortable. I've been using it for a week and my right arm is very happy with me. It's sort of like holding a doughnut with a trigger. It takes a bit to

get used to a trackball, about the same as getting used to a trackpad, but once you get past that, sit back and relax while you surf. There's no more strain as you sit with one arm stuck out in front of you. And, unlike a lot of other mouse designs, this is completely left hand compatible. It's just as comfortable either way. Rocket Mouse is available only at www.rocketmouse.com and will only set you back about \$60. It's available in USB or PS/2 connector. Another great stocking stuffer idea.

Hands down, the number one gift to give the Mac person in your life this year has to be the upgraded version of OS X called Jaguar. It is version 10.2 and sports a lot of new functions. It has also drawn a lot of bad press because of

the way Apple released it. It is not available as an upgrade; if you want it, you have to fork out the full price of \$195. This makes it that much better of a gift because most OS X 10.1 users do not

want to pay for the upgrade just yet. All PR stuff aside, Apple is on the right track and Jaguar is more stable than any OS so far. A ton of new add-ons are included. It sold over 100,000 copies it's first weekend (the best for any Apple OS ever) and will put a smile on any Mac user's face. Check to make sure they haven't installed it already, then head on over to www.mac.ca to pick it up.



While we're all waiting for high definition to turn our living rooms into theatres, there are a few items that will make the wait enjoyable. The PVR (Personal Video Recorder) has had a tough time making it into the mainstream. Cost has been the major issue. But the main cost of a PVR is always the storage. Why not turn that nice big hard drive in your Mac into a storage device for live TV? How do you get TV into it? Why with EYE TV of course – another Mac exclusive. EYE TV has a built in cable tuner, or A/V inputs for a satellite system, and will record your favourite TV shows right on your computer. You can set a timer to record while you're out, skip over commercials, or pause live TV while you watch. Stop buying videotapes and go digital. If you're fortune enough to have a Mac with a video output you can even watch the program on your television. Isn't technology great? EYE TV is available from www.elgato.com for about \$300. A bit more expensive than a VHS recorder, but a whole lot more flexible and more fun too.

If you happen to pick up EYE TV for your Mac sweetie, why not go the extra mile and really put some tinsel on Christmas this year. How about a 23" HD LCD Cinema Display? The Apple LCD monitors are some of the most beautiful pieces of equipment



around. Their slender shape and gentle contours look more like works of art. Add to that their clarity and you've got a high drool factor. The Cinema displays work off the ADC connector available only in Power Mac G4's. There's no need for external power as it draws it right from the computer. It includes a 2-USB hub right on the monitor so that you can connect peripherals and cut back on the clutter and wires running to the computer. It's also high definition (HD) ready with the proper resolution and aspect ratio to see HD the way it was meant to be seen. Now, you might want to be sitting. This monitor is going to cost you about \$5,600 – but that is Canadian. The best place I've found it online is www.macwarehouse.ca. You can't actually order it online, but you can check it out and phone in an order. You still don't have to leave the house, and once you have this thing hooked up, you won't ever want to leave the house.

In fact, get ready for the big game with EYE TV. Sit back on your couch and use the Rocket Mouse to pause and replay live TV showing on your Cinema screen that won't crash, because you're using Jaguar OS X 10.2. Then you can capture the winning play and take it to work on your DiskOnKey and watch it again and again. Now that's a Merry Christmas! Season's greetings to all. ♦

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Bundles 'o console games

GIFT GUIDE

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

In addition to the price war that took place about five months ago, dropping the price of all consoles below \$300, two of the big three console manufacturers are offering package deals to get gamers going this holiday season.

While the GameCube goes for \$229.99 and both Xbox and PS2 go for \$299.99, each of these prices only covers the console, one controller and the necessary RGB and power cables. However, the console is only part of the equation. A console is only as good as the software you play on it.

With that in mind, let's take a look at each of the console manufacturers and what they have in store for gamers this Christmas in the way of bundle deals.

Xbox

The Xbox Sega bundle gives gamers two Sega games as well as an Xbox Controller-S.

Under this deal, included in the price of an Xbox (\$299.99) gamers get *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Sega GT 2002*. JSRF is a cel-shaded game set in Tokyo in the year 2024. Gamers have to go around the city on futuristic inline skates, pulling tricks, spraying graffiti and avoiding the cops.

Sega GT 2002 is an in-depth driving sim that has gamers competing in races to earn cash and buy new cars; think a slightly toned down, not quite so customizable *Gran Turismo*.

The Xbox Controller-S is smaller version of the Xbox's original monolithic controller. It's much easier to manage, has a better button layout and can fit smaller hands.

Nintendo

Nintendo has the *Super Mario Sunshine* GameCube bundle, which pairs the indigo incarnation of the console with the most popular GameCube game to date and a memory card.

This bundle adds \$80 to the price of the

GameCube - about the price of *Super Mario Sunshine* on its own, so the deal here amounts to a free memory card.

Nintendo is also doing bundle deals with its handheld, the Game Boy Advance.

The GBA bundles are retailer-specific and come with one game and a different colour GBA.

The games being bundled vary according to which retailer the unit is purchased from, as does the colour of the GBA. Big name retailers like Future Shop, Wal-Mart and Zellers have their own bundles to offer.

Games being bundled are Yoshi's Island, Mario Kart, *Super Mario World* and *Golden Sun*.

This package deal comes in at \$119.95, which is \$10 more than a GBA alone.

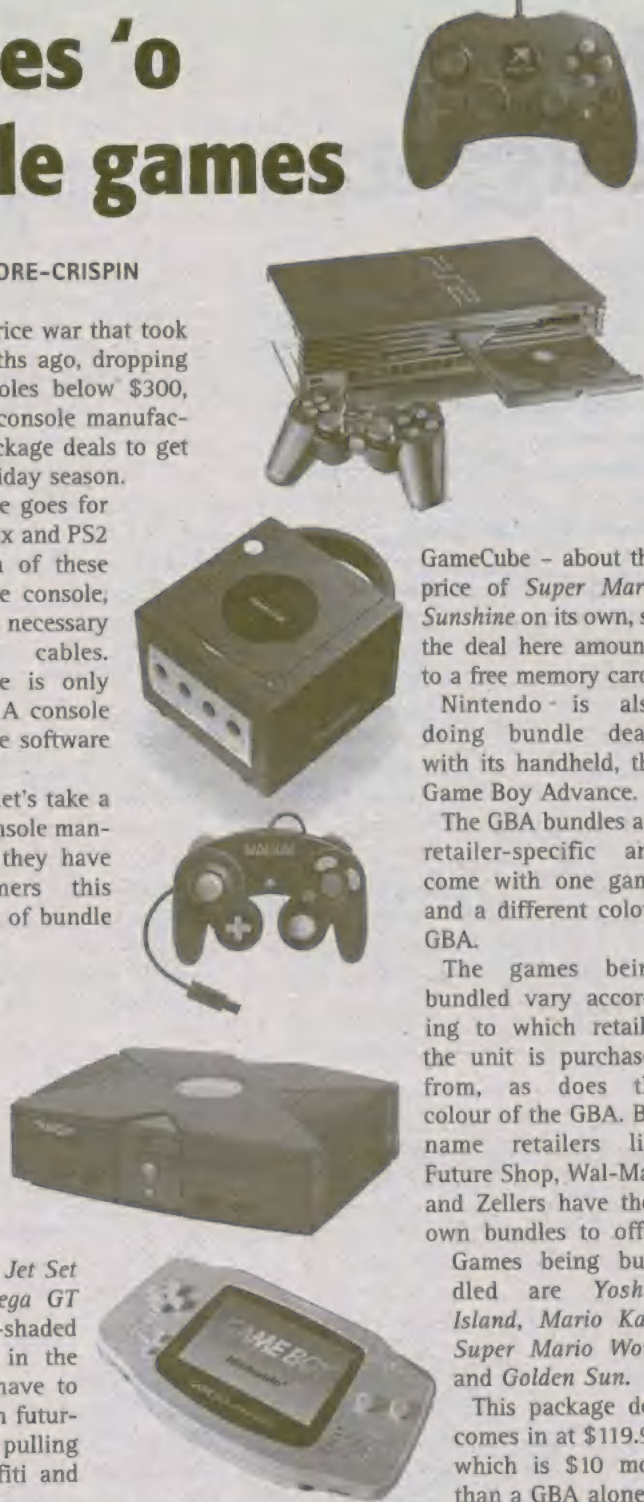
PS2

Sony reps say that no PS2 bundle deals have been announced for the holiday season.

However, since the console has been around the longest of the big three, Sony has a series of games, many of which have been around since shortly after the system launched, in its Greatest Hits collection.

Games in the Greatest Hits collection go for \$29.99 while newer games cost between \$70 and \$80 each.

Games include *Gran Turismo 3*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*, *Twisted Metal Black*, *Jak and Daxter* and some other popular titles, 20 in all. ♦



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Xbox System Splinter Cell Bundle



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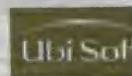
Fiber Scope Snake Camera

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- 10 Splinter Cell Autographed Games • 10 Crystal Method Soundtracks
- 10 Spy Surveillance Glasses • 5 Covert Telephone Recording Adaptors
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Register at www.totalgamer.ca

Open to Canadian residents 18 years and older. Rules available at www.totalgamer.ca. Contest ends December 31st, 2002



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Tales of Doom and skullduggery

By GEOFF MARTIN

During this year's E3 Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles - the foremost gathering of the top minds and wallets in the computer gaming industry - the game that unquestionably drew the most drools was id Software's *Doom III*, whose closed-door demo caused lines to snake around the cavernous L.A. Convention Center on each of the show's three days.

Now, even though the game's release is up to a year away, and despite id's almost Macintosh-like desire to keep a very tight wrap on the technology behind its game, an alpha version of

Doom III has been leaked out to the gaming public, and the folks at id are extremely unimpressed, to say the least. Worse still, the culprit who first leaked the demo is said to work for a certain Canadian hardware company who, at least until now, has enjoyed a very cozy relationship with id Software.

After many people speculated that id had leaked the three-level demo themselves to build anticipation for the guaranteed blockbuster, John Carmack, who is the talent behind the original *Doom*, and the co-owner and technical director of id Software, jumped into the fray himself on Slashdot (www.slashdot.com) to clear things up, and to vent a little. Leaving no doubt as to his mood, the message was titled "Damn it," and read simply, "No, this was not leaked on purpose. Yes, we are upset about it, and it will have some impact on how we deal with some companies in the future, but nothing drastic is going to change in terms of what support is going to be available. Making any judgements from a snapshot intended for a non-interactive demo is ill advised."

Carmack isn't kidding, as *Doom III* is already purported to be the most demanding video game ever made in terms of hardware, and so anyone attempting to play this leaked version is almost sure to be disappointed unless they've paid more for their video card

than most of us would pay for an entire computer. In short, if you're thinking about test-driving the game yourself, don't bother.

Carmack is also not likely to be kidding when he says the incident will affect the way he deals with certain companies, and although he hasn't publicly accused anyone in particular, it's been said that all legitimate copies of the demo were watermarked, which leaves the scurrilous individual responsible for the leak with his or her hand stuck in the virtual cookie jar.

Considering the previous two versions of *Doom* have sold to the tune of about US\$60 million, don't be surprised if this story continues to develop with ill consequences for the guilty party. (id Software's Web site can be found at www.idsoftware.com, although *Doom III* is still under such tight wraps that its existence isn't mentioned.)

Canadian recording industry to launch ad campaign

While the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) plunders along with its embarrassing series of ads featuring gazillionaire musicians such as Britney Spears and F. Diddy speaking out against MP3s (as reported in last month's issue of *TC*), the Canadian Recording Industry Association is taking a different - and most would say wiser - approach.

CRIA is planning to launch an ad campaign early next year that focuses on changing the attitudes of younger music fans in their teens and twenties, many of whom have come of age in the era of Napster and its cousins, and have grown accustomed to thinking that the music industry is the enemy, and that they don't need to pay for the music they listen to.

CRIA has shown a refreshing desire to understand the modern music fan, and will be basing the ad campaign in part on the knowledge they've gleaned from conducting interviews and focus groups with teens, many of whom harbour very cynical opinions of the modern recording business and the prefabricated, board-room-born superstars it's been churning out in recent years.

The ad campaign, called "The Value of Music," will stress to the youngsters that not all of their

favourite artists are independently wealthy, and that many of them depend on the income they receive from record sales for their very survival. The message that will be driven home is that if music fans don't support the creators of the music they're listening to, artists will be forced to find other ways to make money that might not necessarily involve making music, and that the supply of great tunes will be in danger of drying up.

They may have forever missed out on untold millions from those who will never change their downloading habits, but at least the recording industry in Canada is doing something to change things from the ground up by targeting their still-impressionable customers of the future.

Policy conditions: Avoid joybuzzers and hot irons

Entertainment Tonight's Mary Hart may have been on to something a few years back when she insured her famous legs for a million bucks apiece, but the jury is still out on Alex "Dreg" Nikitin, a professional video game player from London, England seeking to insure his fingers.

Nikitin recently qualified for the World Cyber Games in Korea, and in the inevitable delirium that followed, he began to seek an insurance policy on his talented fingers, to the tune of just under \$1 million.

(Alas, Mr. Nikitin failed to take home any medals for his nation in the Cyber Games' *Quake III* competition, but it should be noted that a *Half Life: CounterStrike* clan known as Team NeRve nearly shocked the world after a hard-fought battle with a favoured Russian team, and wound up bringing home a silver medal for Canada after winning the national championship right here in Toronto.)

There's no word if he's had any takers just yet, but Nikitin's quest for an insurance policy could be nothing more than a clever ruse by a young man willing to lose a digit or two as part of a get-rich-quick scheme. If you ever find yourself shaking hands with a three-fingered chap with a British accent and a grinning mouthful of gold teeth who says he's too busy globetrotting to play video games, take a stab and ask if his name happens to be Alex. ♦



The fun continues in NOLF 2

By CHRIS TALBOT

Many gamers who picked up and played the original *The Operative: No One Lives Forever* will have mixed feelings about Agent Cate Archer's newest adventure.

While *NOLF* was a spectacular game with an excellent story, certain aspects of the game left something to be desired. Stealth missions stand out as the least acceptable part of *NOLF* because if you set off one alarm or got spotted by just one measly guard, your game was over. In fact, it was a stealth mission that kept me from (legitimately) finishing the game.

Fans of *NOLF* (or of first-person shooters in general) should have no fear that *No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy In H.A.R.M.'s Way* has the same flaws as its predecessors. The developers at Monolith have not only made the stealth missions a little more dynamic so that they aren't as frustrating, they've also greatly improved the gameplay and enhanced the facial features and animations of the characters in the game (translate that into a higher polygon count and more care being taken).

In this new adventure, the evil agents of H.A.R.M. are back, and the United States has uncovered a Soviet project that could jumpstart World War III (non-initiates should know that the *NOLF* games are set in the Cold War of the 1960s). Of course, H.A.R.M. bosses also want some sweet revenge on Cate for her role in foiling their last plan for world domination. They've acquired the services of a rather large crack team of ninja assassins to put Cate on ice. The first part of the game actually takes place in Japan, where Cate has been assigned to find out the identity of the mysterious Director.

The single player game contains more than 40 levels that will take Cate around the world from England to Japan to Siberia. Cate also has a few new toys at her disposal, including a

Katana sword, a taser, bear traps, shurikens, a compact-shaped code breaker and bananas (for tripping up unsuspecting enemies, of course — Monolith developers have an odd sense of humour). Other items have gone through modifications. The cigarette lighter/blow torch has become a hair-spray/welder. The spy camera now appears as a tube of lipstick. The cross-bow has a nifty, new scope on it so you can zoom in on your targets.

The funky music, silly humour and kooky villains haven't been left behind. Some characters return from the original game, while a number of new characters (both good and bad) are introduced.

Monolith is hyping the multiplayer mode of *NOLF 2* and has sworn to create downloadable add-ons like a new death-match mode and team-based maps over the next few months. Multiplayer was the weakest part of Agent Archer's first adventure. While the multiplayer has been improved, the biggest attraction to this game is in the single player campaign. The story is as interesting and the action as diverse as what was found in the first title in the series. The gameplay controls are more-or-less the same as in *NOLF*, but there have been a few tweaks that won't take much time to get used to. New players to the series should have little difficulty jumping in if they've ever played a PC-based FPS before.

Overall, *No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy In H.A.R.M.'s Way* is an excellent game with a story that will keep gamers coming back for more. ♦

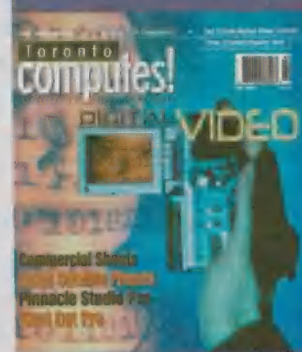
more INFO

No One Lives Forever 2
\$74.99
Sierra
www.sierra.com



Minimum requirements:
300 MHz Pentium II (or equivalent)
Windows 98/2K/ME/XP
64 MB RAM (128 MB rec.)
DirectX 8.1
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Roller Coaster Tycoon returns

By WILLIAM A. WOOD

Roller Coaster Tycoon was an enormously popular game that has stayed on the best-seller chart for years, spawning two well-received expansions. To say that its sequel (the imaginatively named *Roller Coaster Tycoon 2*) has been eagerly anticipated is an understatement. So, step right up, folks, here it is – and it's a little underwhelming, at least at first glance.

RCT2 looks almost exactly like *RCT*. Indeed, I'll bet most

gamers couldn't tell the difference from a typical screenshot. The graphics are still adequate, but this is a bit disappointing.

Gameplay is also the same, although the goals are typically harder and the scenarios longer. You are given control of a theme park, often partially constructed, and have a certain number of years to increase attendance, park value, profit, the number/quality of roller coasters, or something similar. To do this, you build rides, concessions and roller coasters, hire staff and perform landscaping.

The options from *RCT* (and its expansions) are all here, including custom painting, music and so on. There are some new rides and shops, although ultimately these are just variations on a theme. There are no new staff options.

All this to say, if you played *RCT*, you're in for a whole bucket of déjà vu.

Use the tools

But if you scratch the surface, you'll find *RCT2* is a more open-ended game than its predecessor. For one thing, you no longer have to progress through scenarios to "unlock" later games. The best new inclusion is the Scenario Editor tool. With it, you can create as many challenges for yourself as you like (and download a world full of other players' as well). The editor can be time-consuming, but it's

easy to use and has a lot of options.

The new *Roller Coaster Designer* tool is also handy, although it isn't accessible from within a game, and it doesn't include terrain (just a flat surface).

RCT2 may be a bit overwhelming for beginners. There are only three ready-made "easy" scenarios, which is not enough practice to get up to speed for the more challenging scenarios. Fifteen of the original *RCT* scenarios are available for download from the official Web site – I recommend them.

Also, one of the game's selling points seems to be a license to use Six Flags rides and parks, which may thrill "real-world" coaster fans. And ultimately, *RCT2* is really just *RCT*, only more so.

But if you're willing to put in some time, *RCT2* is still a great game – one that's relatively inexpensive and performs well on lower-end machines. Recommended. ♦

more INFO

RollerCoaster Tycoon 2
\$47.99
Infogrames
www.rollercoastertycoon2.com



Minimum requirements:
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DirectX 8.1
120 MB free hard-drive space

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Sharlene Myers

At Play

As a child, my sister's favourite game was *Monopoly*. She was good at it, too. Whether based in fact or just my envious perceptions, I remember her winning nearly every game. Rather than taking vicarious joy in her skill and advising her to aim for a career in real estate, I learned to hate the game, naturally, and would avoid playing if possible. After all, why spend hours playing a game I was sure I would lose? (It appears all those lessons my parents tried to teach me about losing graciously hadn't sunk in yet.)

Because of this early trauma, I hadn't played the game in years, in the hopes that avoiding the painful memories would keep me out of expensive therapy.

Then a CD copy of the video game version appeared on my desk, a free gift in a box of cereal, as it turns out. And I

told myself, "I'm older now, I can handle it. My life is so much more than my success or failure at *Monopoly*." I was pretty convincing.

So I popped in the CD. One of the advantages to the PC game is that players can choose from a number of different boards based on North American cities, or even build their own board. One of these available boards is Toronto.

My first purchase was The Beaches, inspiring congratulatory comments from Mr. Pennybags, who assured me, "Even these properties can be valuable!" No kidding.

I managed to acquire the Electric Company (in spite of the provincial government), Bay Street, Forest Hill, the Sky Dome, the Bloor Line and the Go Train, which I picked up for \$30 at auction. I started to think I had finally shaken my *Monopoly* curse.

Unfortunately, my computer opponent got the first monopoly — Spadina Avenue, Queen Street and College Street — and mortgaged nearly everything in his portfolio to improve the properties and jack up the rent. The gamble paid off for him, as I landed on them over

and over again on my way out of jail (three times!). Ultimately, it was my undoing. I landed in a hotel on College Street with a rack rate of \$1,000. Pretty pathetic really — bankrupt because of a night in a hotel in a city where I owned plenty of my own places to stay.

A few years ago, shortly after my sister and I were both married and while we were still living in the same city, we decided, somehow, that playing *Monopoly* would be a fun way for the four of us to spend New Year's Eve. It was soon evident that her mysterious *Monopoly* talents had not diminished over the years, and she led the game right from the start. Her husband, who ironically was the only business student in the room, was sinking fast and found himself unable to meet her rent demand. Faced with bankruptcy, he turned to me and proposed a merger.

Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped. It had never occurred to her that this was possible, and she was sure it couldn't be allowed. Looking back, I'm not sure the move was legal, based on standard rules, but the prospect of leaving him shut out of a game that was

otherwise fairly even and would likely continue for hours seemed rather contrary to the spirit of the evening. She gave in and the game continued. She won, of course.

The game we had that New Year's Eve simply wouldn't have happened if we'd been playing on computer. There is no bending the rules when they're automated, and no provision for mergers — once you're bankrupt, you're out. Rents are collected automatically too, spoiling my strategy of trying to distract property owners so they don't notice I'm squatting until it's too late to collect (perfectly legal, by the way). There's no charming or cajoling an AI player during a trade, so transactions seem more cold and calculating. And it's hard to imagine four people sitting around a computer on New Year's Eve with drinks and snacks and music, revealing their inner ruthless capitalist alter-egos, could have as much fun as we had that night with the low-tech classic board game.

Which leads me to conclude that (a) sometimes adding technology doesn't improve things, and (b) maybe I've finally learned to lose graciously. ♦

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Rise to the challenge of Hitman

By HAROLD LASS

Baldie is back, nape of the neck bar code and all. Eidos's latest, *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin* is the baddest. In fact a whole slew of major cable networks (TNN, ABC Sports, Comedy Central to name a few) that were scheduled to air Eidos' massive media blitz for the game opted not to run the spot. Reasons given - "Glorifies Violence ...," "violence depicted," "Over the top sexual content," "the game looked a little too realistic and people might not know that it was just a

game." If that ain't a formula for furious sales, nothing is. *Hitman 2* has hit the shelves big time and is a runaway winner with well over a million units shipped.

You are Agent 47, the anonymous assassin, master of a deadly arsenal of weapons (10 more than the original *Hitman* game), including an impressive array of silent killers (garrotte, knife, sedatives, axe) when stealth is called for. Deceived into returning to active service by a Russian kingpin, Agent 47 eventually finds himself the hunted, not the hunter. As with the first game, your priority is to eliminate your targets. But that's where the resemblance ends. The gameplay and AI are a big improvement over the first *Hitman* release.

You begin in monastic retreat in the Church of the Carmine, Sicily, gardening (yes, gardening) and seeking forgiveness for the blood on your hands. When Father Vittorio, your mentor, is kidnapped, it's time to heave the hoe and brandish the ballers. After re-connecting with Diana, your contact from Agency, the killings begin. You can, of course, approach your missions in one of two ways - go in with guns blazing (not recommended) or use stealth and deception. Clearly, as your job description silent assassin implies, stealth and deception are the preferred M.O. They're also insidiously challenging, more so

with only five save games per level in Normal mode, two in Expert and none in Professional. Mind you, unlike the original *Hitman*, you can save anywhere - a welcome change. Your "work" will take you around the world - Sicily, Russia, Japan, Malaysia and India. Cool as these locations are, they're not the most important element in the game-play. Intelligent planning cautiously carried out is what wins the day. If you're looking for a lot of running and gunning, this game may not be for you.

To help you survive all eight missions, the in-game display features a "health bar" (which I continually depleted) and a "threat meter" to indicate the level of danger Agent 47 faces. The more it pulses, the greater the danger. You can also toggle between 3rd and 1st person shooter, which came in handy when a clear site was required (the "professionals" should be able to complete a mission by firing only one shot).

The AI is also uncannily intelligent. If your disguise isn't quite right (mailmen don't carry guns - a minor point I overlooked), then all hell breaks loose. Or if you make eye contact with a body guard for too long, you're toast. Don't dispose of a body and watch the alarms go off. Unlike Lara Croft, you can't litter the playing field with corpses. The fact that there are a number of paths you

can take to complete each level gives you an opportunity to try a different approach next time around to calm the threat meter.

The audio complete with an original score performed by the Budapest Symphony Orchestra and Choir and the graphics are first rate. The game engine generates more polygons than the first *Hitman*, so details are incredibly clear and rendered smoothly. The voice talent is also impressive. Clearly, actors, not friends of the programmers, were used.

Despite some game bugs, this game is rivetting and a real challenge to play. Try it. It's an offer you can't refuse. ♦

more INFO

Hitman 2
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www.eidosinteractive.com



System Requirements - Minimum Specs:
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RAM: 128 MB
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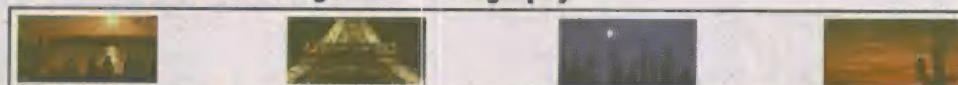
Congratulations Sally, your picture was chosen as the best of the many entries we received for the third bi-monthly Photo Spree contest, and for the record, the cat's answer to Wanna Play? looks to be a pretty emphatic "no."

Honourable mention to Jason Derikozis for his entry, "Paw and Nose."

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Sniper game takes aim at terrorists, not civilians



A new video game serves as a chilling déjà vu torn from recent headlines.

Konami's *Silent Scope 3* for the PlayStation 2 puts the player in the shoes of a sniper commissioned to shoot and kill from afar.

But despite the growing media concern over its apparent similarities to the Washington, D.C.-area killings, the targets in the game are terrorists – not civilians. In fact, the player is a government operative hired to eradicate an evil organization and is penalized for shooting innocent characters.

Silent Scope 3 is the latest console adaptation of a popular coin-operated

arcade game from 1999. It is rated Mature by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB), therefore retailers should not sell this title to players below the age of 17.

Nevertheless, the timing of such a sharp-shooting game has once again placed a spotlight on the billion-dollar video game industry and its alleged lax stance on violence and gore.

A debate has surfaced over the past decade as to whether or not there is a correlation between playing violent video games and acting out aggressively.

According to Douglas Lowenstein, president of the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA), "While there may be many self-proclaimed 'experts' on media violence who claim video games cause aggressive behaviour, this claim is at odds with the facts."

Lowenstein continues: "Reports from the Surgeon General of the United States, the Washington State Department of Health, the Government of Australia [and] the Children's Software Revue, an independent critic of computer games for children ... all repudiate claims that violent media and/or video games lead to aggressive behaviour."

In early October, the sniper reportedly scrawled the message "Dear Policeman – I am God" on a Tarot "Death" card and

left it not far from where a 13-year-old student was critically injured.

The authorities and media alike immediately scrambled for clues related to these words – one such theory suggested the sniper was a video gamer, as this phrase can be found in the popular "3-D shooter" genre.

Geoff Keighley, editor-in-chief of GameSlice (www.gameslice.com), a video game industry Web site, clarifies the association. "First-person action games on the PC often include a hidden feature called 'God Mode,' which makes the player invincible; this mode is toggled by entering a cheat code into the keyboard," begins Keighley.

"In the fantasy action game *Drakan*, you actually type in the words 'I AM GOD' into your keyboard to become invulnerable" says Keighley.

The phrase "I am God" does not appear anywhere in *Silent Scope 3*.

Still, Lowenstein maintains, "The notion that using a mouse or controller in a video game can teach people to be a sharp shooter is absurd."

"Video games available to the public differ from combat simulators used by the military and could never effectively train anyone – physically or psychologically – to kill," says Lowenstein.

Konami was not available for comment. ♦

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Profile:

Brendan Canning



Forget what you've heard. Canadian bands are making great music. Brendan Canning has the unusual distinction of belonging to two of them. The soft-spoken, self-effacing (proving that you can't take the Canada out of Canadian), 33-year-old Torontonian is one of the main performers behind studio outfit Cookie Duster and "supergroup" Broken Social Scene. Both bands have put out superlative efforts in the last two years including a new one (*You Forgot It In People*) from Broken Social Scene released last month.

While Cookie Duster makes heavy use of electronic instrumentation, and Broken Social Scene less so, Canning isn't as tech-inclined as you might think. "A lot of people get excited by technology," he says. "I don't really get too excited by it. I record with technology and I sort of have to, but at the same time I kind of surround myself with people who are inclined that way. And I just try to hold up my end of the bargain as far as being someone who hopefully has a set of ears that tells them right from wrong or good from bad."

Who: Brendan Canning, jack-of-all-trades (guitar, bass guitar, songwriting, keyboards) with progressive rockers Broken Social Scene and rock-electronica group Cookie Duster.

Computer now used: Dell PC; "It's pretty fast."

Computer first used: "Something in high school that I probably got a lot of help on."

Favourite computer: "No, I don't have any particular emotional attachments to any computers."

Other technical gadgetry in use at this time (cells, PDA, etc.): No. "Other than e-mailing and writing up invoices or looking up songs that's sort of the extent of my use."

Do you use your computer for play? No.

Best thing about the technology you have: "I like the fact that I can get messages to people. If you've got a hard part to play or something, you can do lots of chopping of parts of songs (with studio software) and you run into lots of happy accidents while you're working with different programs."

Worst thing: "On the flip side of saying how great it is to get messages to people, I don't write letters any more. And also for music, a lot of music that comes out, you can really tell when it's been chopped up and it makes it sort of ... you're less inclined to exact a part or do something perfectly when you have mounds of extra space on your hard drive to say, 'OK, well, there's five different guitar tracks and we'll just chop and pick the best parts.'"

What can't you live without: Telephone. "Well, I guess I could live without a television. Although I do like watching movies."

Is there anything you think you need? No.

What frustrates you the most about technology? "Everything about computers frustrates me. I'm probably just lazy. I'm not a good figure-outer. I lose patience quickly. I have plenty of patience for other things but my brain just hasn't caught up with technology, I suppose."

Personal take on issues dealing with technology: "I think it just makes people lazy. I DJ'ed some party the other night for Yahoo.com so it was a whole room full of computer people. It just seemed really boring to me." ♦

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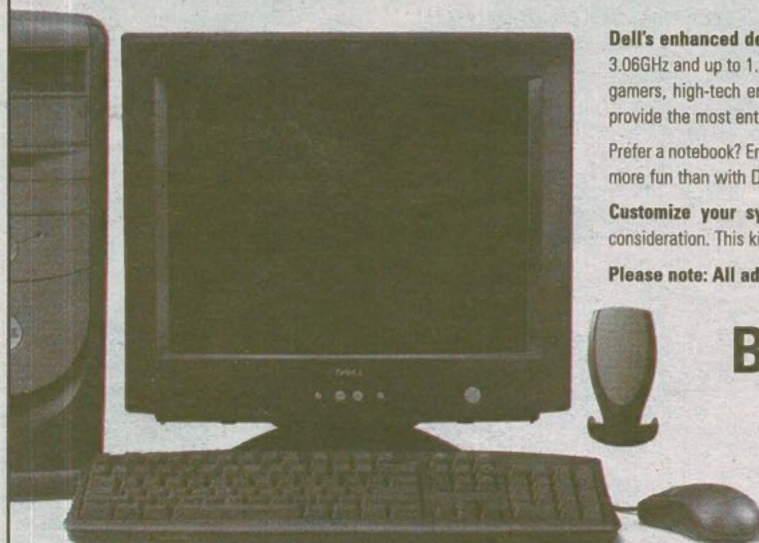
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